

*May one wheel*

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# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY **2<sup>D</sup>** SATURDAY

Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



**"NO ONE LEAVES  
THIS ROOM UNTIL MY  
LOCKET IS FOUND!"**

**A Sensational End to  
the Pillow Fight!**

*(See this week's long complete  
Cliff House School story).*



Back at Cliff House for a new term with all your old favourites—and an unusual new girl. Meet Thalia Pascoe in this Grand Long Complete story.



# Only BABS COULD CONTROL HER!

## A New Term Push!



"BABS! Here's Babs!"  
 "Hallo, Babs! How did you enjoy your holiday?"  
 "Babs, old thing! I say—"  
 "Babs—"

Barbara Redfern breathlessly laughed.

"Whoops! Let a girl get out of the bus!" she cried as she stepped from the vehicle, surveying the excited crowd of Cliff House schoolgirls who were thronging round it—most of those girls, like herself, looked tanned and brown and sparkling with good health derived from the long summer vacation. "Phoo! What a welcome! Hallo, Gwen! Hallo, Di! Hallo, Rosa! And there are the old twins again!" she added, her blue eyes dancing. "Cheerio, twins!"

"Oh, Barbara, how do you do?" precise Priscilla and earnest Ermytrude Terraine simpered. "We had a lovely time! Did you?"

"Topping!" Babs said. "Still, jolly glad to be back again. I say, it's fun seeing you all!" she dimpled. "But gangway for Mabs and Bessie and Clara!"—as Bessie Bunter, beaming plumply, and golden-haired Mabel Lynn, and Clara Trevlyn, more unruly haired and tomboyish than ever, stepped down after her. "Well, here we are!" she laughed. "First day of term and all the old faces back again! I say, what price celebrating in the tuckshop?"

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"Hurrah!" Bessie cheered. "Come on, everybody! My treat, you know!"

Babs laughed gaily. Everybody laughed. Everybody, in spite of the fact that the summer holidays were over and they had all arrived back for a new term of work at Cliff House School, seemed bubblingly happy and in the greatest of good spirits.

Glad they might be at the end of term to get away from school, but there was no thrill, somehow, like getting back to school to see all the old faces once again.

Quite a crowd of girls had collected to welcome Barbara Redfern & Co., for Babs, captain of the Fourth Form and junior school, was easily the most popular girl in the junior school. And her study-mates, Bessie and Mabs, and Clara from Study No. 7, were great favourites, too. The others who had been on holiday with them had already arrived.

Excitedly now a crowd of Fourth Formers surrounded Babs & Co. And the tuckshop, when they reached it, was thronged with other happy girls. A fresh cry went up as Babs was sighted.

"Babs; you old washout, so here you are!" Margot Lantham cried. "Come in and have something! My treat!"

"No, please—my treat," another girl protested—a dark-haired, rather fallow-faced girl who, though not very much taller than Babs, was a Sixth Former, and not only a senior but a prefect into the bargain, for she was Rona Fox, the vice-captain of the Cliff House senior cricket eleven.

"I'm in the chair," she said heartily. "My Uncle George gave me a five-

to blue before I left him at Southampton, so I'm going to blue it. What is it, Barbara? Grape-fruit with ice-cream?"

"Well, thanks, Rona," Babs said, with a warm flush of pleasure, and smiled genially, for if this was going to be a sample of Rona Fox through the new term things were starting with an auspicious bang. Not often was it they found the usually sly Rona so amiable.

"What's come over her?" Mabel Lynn chuckled.

Nobody knew. But it was nice to get a welcome from a girl like Rona Fox. Only one girl, indeed, seemed not to share in the genial gladness that attended Babs & Co.'s arrival.

That girl was sipping a lemonade aloofly in a corner. Her sallow face wore its usual mid-term scowl, though to be sure her dress was as immaculately expensive as ever. She also wore a suspicion of powder on her face and more than a suspicion of polish on her nails. She smiled loftily at Babs as Babs grinned at her.

"Lo, Lydia! Have a good time?"

"Thanks," Lydia Crossendale drawled. "Better than you, I expect. I went to Egypt, not a cheap holiday camp!"

"Which," Clara Trevlyn grinned, "is a knock at us, eh? We went to a holiday camp, and a jolly fine time we had there, too! Still, glad to see Lydia hasn't changed. It would be simply too staggering if we found her in a good humour for once, wouldn't it? I say, here's the Charmer!" she added enthusiastically.

"Charmer, Clara?" And the exceedingly pretty mistress of the Fourth

Form who entered at that moment gazed questioningly at the incautious Tomboy. "Who is that?"

"Oh crumbs! I—I didn't mean to say that, Miss Charmant," Clara stammered. "At least," she added, "I didn't intend you to hear it. But—Well, that's your nickname, you know!"

"Oh!" Miss Charmant said, and smiled, for "Charmer" was hardly a nickname at which she could take offence. "Thank you for the compliment," she said. "So glad to see you all again. And if," she added, "anybody is standing drinks, I'll have a home-made lemonade! Thalia, my dear, will you step this way? I want to introduce you."

"Hallo—new girl?" Babs asked. "Aunt Jones"—to the tuckshop keeper—"a lemonade for Miss Charmant, please. Hallo!" she added frankly to the girl who now stood before her.

"Hallo!" that girl answered. And Babs eyed her curiously. For this girl, eyes ashine, with jet black hair, was rather striking. "Are you Barbara Redfern?" she added eagerly. "Miss Primrose told me such heaps about you. I'm Thalia Pascoe."

"My hat, what a name!" Lydia Crossendale gurgled.

Thalia Pascoe turned upon her, and for a moment Babs was surprised to see the stormy look which came into her dark features. But Miss Charmant spoke first.

"Lydia was hardly kind," she said. "Yes, Thalia, this is Barbara," she added, "and I do hope that you and she are going to be good friends!"

Thalia's dark eyes sparkled. "Well, I'm sure if Barbara will have me for a friend—" she said.

"Of course!" Babs dimpled at her. Such a startling-looking girl, so marvellously self-possessed, and yet for all that looking diffident and uneasy somehow. "We'll get along fine!"

"Barbara, may I have a few words with you outside?" Miss Charmant put in then. "It's rather important. Clara, please would you look after Thalia?"

She stepped outside, and Babs, puzzled, followed her.

"Barbara, I could hardly speak to you among such a crowd," the mistress said. "But this newcomer, Thalia. She is really a gipsy girl, and a protegee of Miss Primrose."

Babs looked a little surprised. "Miss Primrose apparently met her at some entertainment which was given at one of her charitable homes during the holidays," Miss Charmant went on.

"Thalia's foster-mother died just a little while ago, and in consequence Thalia was rather adrift. She did some good turn for Miss Primrose, and Miss Primrose, discovering how marvellously she could do certain things, had the idea of putting her in charge of one of the working sections of her London home for orphans."

"Oh!" Babs said, and nodded interestedly, for, like everyone else, she was very well acquainted with the head-mistress' charitable activities, and had, in fact, helped in more than one of them in the past. "And Thalia, she likes the idea?" she questioned.

"Thalia," Miss Charmant smiled, "is just wild with excitement at the prospect. I'm afraid, Barbara, she's a little wild in other directions, too; but I'm coming to that. As it happens, the vacancy which Miss Primrose intended Thalia to fill is not available yet, and so Miss Primrose, for the time being, has allowed her to come to the school."

## By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER.

"Good idea!" Babs nodded.

"Very good—especially," Miss Charmant said, "as Thalia is, as I hinted, inclined to be a trifle uncontrolled. All her life she has lived with gipsies, doing all the things she wanted to do, saying all the things she felt like saying, so utterly different from other girls, because, I gather, her very indulgent foster-mother exercised no restraint over her and let her go her own way in everything."

"Well, now, that brings me to the point," she added seriously. "Such a girl, in her present untamed state, is hardly the sort Miss Primrose could introduce into a position of authority in one of her homes. Her idea, then, is that Thalia shall settle down here for a while in order to absorb the discipline she has never had."

"And so," Babs said, nodding, "fit her for the more important job? But, I say, Miss Charmant, suppose she doesn't settle down?"

"Then"—and Miss Charmant shook her head—"I am afraid she will have



**"For her own sake, Thalia Pascoe must make good at Cliff House!" That was what Barbara Redfern was told, and, liking the new girl as she did, Babs resolved to back her up. But Thalia had come from a life amongst the gipsies. She was tempestuous and undisciplined, used to saying and doing what her mood prompted. She swiftly made an enemy of Lydia Crossendale—and trouble began. Apart from that, a mysterious gold locket seemed certain to bring about her downfall.**

to go back to her gipsies, which she doesn't want to do now that her foster-mother is dead. For her own sake Thalia must make good at Cliff House—show that she is fitted for the position Miss Primrose is ready to confer upon her. Now, this is why I wanted to speak to you, Barbara. Thalia, for the time being, will go into your Form. Miss Primrose has expressly asked me to ask you to look after her, make a friend of her, and do all you can in your own way to tame her down a little. In the meantime, I am to give Miss Primrose a special report of all her doings and her actions when she returns."

"Miss Primrose isn't back, then?" Babs asked.

"Not yet. Nor will she be for a few days," Miss Charmant said. "Barbara, you can, of course, refuse this task if you wish."

"I'll be jolly glad to take it on," Babs said instantly. "Thalia looks an awfully nice girl."

Miss Charmant's face cleared. "I'm delighted to hear you say that, Barbara. Will you have her in your study? I feel it would be better if she were under your eye all the time."

"Mm, rather!" Babs said. "Mabs and Bessie will get along well with her, I'm sure. Then—then that's settled?"

"Barbara, thank you, yes. Now," Miss Charmant said, "will you take my empty glass back for me, because I must fly? I'll leave you to get to know Thalia, shall I? And, Barbara, you will do your best for her?"

"You know I will, Miss Charmant!" Babs promised earnestly.

She stepped back into the tuckshop, a little warm glow at her heart. Nice of Primmy to give the gipsy girl a chance—but nicer still of Primmy to feel that she could help Thalia so much.

And instinctively she liked Thalia. Into the tuckshop she made her way, to find Thalia at the counter, and interestedly talking to her was Rona Fox.

Rona, for once, seemed almost friendly.

"And where," she asked, "were you born?"

"I don't know," Thalia said. "Nobody knows. You see, when I was a baby, about two, my foster-mother found me in some wood after a thunder-storm. That's how I came to be a gipsy."

"And you've lived with the gipsies ever since?" Rona asked.

"Yes." "Making baskets and mending chairs, I bet!" Lydia said, with a half-sneer.

"Yes," Thalia stared at her. "I also made pegs and dolls and carved wood and cooked meals. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing!" Lydia said scornfully. "But I must say it's like

Primmy's check to send you here. What else did you do?"

"Well, I looked after stalls at the fairs," Thalia said. "I ran the coconut stall mostly!"

"What a girl!" Lydia murmured. "And sometimes I did a turn in the circus," Thalia seriously went on.

"Trapeze work, you know!" "And jolly interesting, I should say," Babs put in.

"Seems," Clara said heartily, "we've got a candidate in you for the gym team, Thalia! Do you jump?"

"Oh, yes, and run!" Thalia added simply. "I can ride horseback and swim, too, you know!"

"And blow your own trumpet, eh?" Lydia sneered.

"No, I can't do that, but I can play a banjo," Thalia said, and blinked surprisedly at the chuckle which went round. "I can dance, too!" she added proudly.

"In fact," Lydia scoffed, "there's nothing you can't do? And knowing what gipsies are like, I'll bet you're just the cat's pyjamas at pinching and poaching! Ever done a bit of house-breaking in your blameless life?"

"Lydia, your cat!" Babs cried, her face aflame.

Thalia stared at her. Then it seemed, all at once, she did understand. Dark the flush which suddenly came into her cheeks.

As a chuckle went up from one or two of the meaner-minded girls she clenched her hands.

"I think," she said quietly, "you are trying to insult me!"

"Just," Lydia sneered, "impossible! How can one insult a wonder-worker like you?"

"Say, you are sorry!" Thalia rapped. "What?"

"Say you are sorry!" Thalia repeated.

"What a hope!" Lydia jeered. "My, what do you think—oh, help!" she cried frantically, for straight as a die Thalia's arm shot out, and her finger and thumb gripped Lydia's nose.

"Now will you say—"

"Thalia!" Babs cried. "Steady!"

She caught Thalia's hand, pulling it back, and Thalia, with a half-puzzled, half-grim look, released the other girl.

"Thalia, you must—" Babs began, and then gasped as Lydia, turning furiously, caught up her half-empty glass of lemonade and swished the contents into Thalia's features. "Lydia, you awful thing—"

Back with a splatter went Thalia. But only for a moment. With an inarticulate cry, she hurled herself upon Lydia. Just in time Babs and Clara Trevlyn grabbed her.

"Let me get at her!" Thalia cried.

"Lydia, get out!" Babs panted. "Get out, you fool! Thalia— Oh, my hat! Rona, give a hand!" she cried, for though Clara was very strong, and Babs herself no weakling, Thalia, in her fury, was too much for them.

Lydia, looking scared now, backed away.

"Thalia!" Rona snapped, and caught her. "Don't be a hooligan, girl! Lydia, for throwing that lemonade at her you will take fifty lines! Thalia, for attacking Lydia, you will take a hundred!" Her amber-colour eyes were glimmering then. The old Rona was back! "I believe," she said, turning to Babs, "this girl is going to be in your charge?"

"Yes, that's right," Babs said. "But, Rona—"

"Then," Rona said, "take her away! And the first thing you can do is teach her a few manners!"

"Lydia asked for it!" Mabs cried.

"And jolly well deserved it!" Clara put in.

"Clara, how dare you! Take twenty lines! Mabel, you also take twenty lines!" Rona rapped. "Get that girl out of it!"

"Oh, be fair, Rona!" Babs exclaimed.

"Fifty lines for you, Barbara! And if you don't take that girl away at once, I'll double your imposition!"

Thalia stared at her.

"But Barbara hasn't done anything!" she protested.

Rona gritted her teeth.

"Stop arguing, I tell you! Do as you are told! Barbara, if you remain in this shop another moment—"

"But—" Thalia flamed.

"Thalia, come on!" Babs cried.

And Thalia, tame enough now, but still bewildered, suffered herself to be led away when Babs pulled gently at her arm.

it, Thalia? This will be your study now, you know."

"I—I think it's lovely!" Thalia breathed.

"But, Babs dear, that Lydia girl—"

"Take no notice of Lydia!" Babs said hastily. "Nor Rona. Nobody really likes them."

"But, Barbara, those lines—"

"Well, what are lines?" Babs laughed. "I expect I shall collect a few bushels before term is out! Although," she added with a frown, "steer clear of Lydia, Thalia. She'll probably have it in for you after that brush up. Now supposing," Babs added, "just while there's time before dinner, we get your things into this study, Thalia?"

"And—and you do forgive me, Babs, for losing my temper in the tuck-shop?"

"Of course! Enough to make you lose it, I should think. All the same," Babs pointed out, "for your own sake, Thalia, do try to keep it in check. You know, don't you, that Miss Charmant has got to give Miss Primrose a report of your conduct, and you know on that report depends whether you go to the home or not?"

"Yes," Thalia said humbly. "I—I'm sorry," she said a little uncertainly. "I say, what a lovely chair!"

"Yes, rather! My favourite, you know," Bessie beamed. "But you can sit in it whenever you like! I like you, you know!" the plump one added warmly.

"And—and I like you—all of you," Thalia said. "But I don't like Lydia, and I don't like that girl Rona; even though she was friendly at first. I've got my things in the dormitory, Babs," she added eagerly. "Shall we go and get them now?"

"Right-ho!" Babs laughed. "This way."

To the Fourth Form dormitory, in which Thalia had already been given a locker and a bed they went. There, with a laugh, she opened her locker, and Babs smiled as she noticed the extreme orderliness with which her things had been set out. To be sure, there were not many treasures for study use; a few books, a rather quaint and pretty ivory ornament inlaid with jade, and a small workbasket of such exquisite workmanship that Babs' eyes widened.

"Oh, Thalia, how beautiful that is!" she cried. "Please let me have a look at it. Where did you get it?"

"I made it," Thalia said simply.

Babs whistled. She began to see now why Miss Primrose had hit upon the idea of earmarking Thalia for a leader of one of her working sections. Even Marjorie Hazeldene, the sweet-tempered Fourth Former who had done similar work, could not have accomplished this.

"You like it?" Thalia asked.

"Oh, Thalia, I think it's wonderful!" Babs breathed.

"Then," Thalia said with eager impulsiveness, "I give it to you—yes, Barbara, please! You have been so very kind to me—that I would like to make you a little present. I can make another for myself."

"But, Thalia, it must take you days!"

Thalia laughed.

"Barbara, please—you must have it! It will make me so happy. Now this ornament I also made from an old ivory horn which was thrown on a dustheap and some pieces of broken jade my foster-mother gave me. This," Thalia said proudly, "I will give to the study."

"Oh, Thalia, you are too generous!" "Not generous—no! Only conceited,"

Thalia happily laughed. "When I leave the school I would like to leave behind something so that you may remember me, you see. And here is a lace handkerchief which I have made," she added. "Mabs shall have that. For Bessie—now what have I for Bessie? Ah!"

She drew out a thing of intricate and delicate needlework. It was a cushion cover.

Babs gulped. She felt overwhelmed. Generous, impulsive Thalia! More and more she found herself liking her.

Back to Study No. 4 they went then, to excite and delight Mabs and Bessie with Thalia's unlooked-for gifts. Thalia beamed proudly, most obviously enjoying to the full these new friends of hers. Then Mabs suggested, as they still had time before dinner and as the weather was rather stickily warm, that they should go down to the swimming bath. Thalia received that news with eager delight.

"Oh, please, I love to swim!" she cried. "I'll get my swim-suit, shall I?"

"I'll come with you," Mabs said. "Babs, shall I bring yours, too? I don't suppose you'll come, will you, Bessie?"

Bessie wouldn't. The plump, good-hearted duffer, had no liking for cold water. Off then Thalia and Mabs scampered, and in two minutes were back again with wraps and swimsuits.

"Shall we change here—now?" Thalia asked.

"My goodness, no!" Babs laughed. "We should have our heads chopped off! It's one of the rules of the school, you know, that swimming suits are only allowed to be worn in the pool."

"So many rules you have," Thalia sighed. For a moment she looked disappointed. "One may not take this or take that, and one must obey the words of horrid girls like Rona Fox. Never before have I had to think of rules and what I should and should not do. But here—"

"Here," Babs said quietly, "you have to toe the line, Thalia. That's what we call discipline. It's because Miss Primrose thinks you need discipline that she's giving you a trial here. When you go to her home, you know, you will be in charge of girls, and it will be your job then to make rules and give others orders. And you can't expect to do that, can you," she added gently, "if you don't get used to obeying rules yourself?"

Thalia smiled a dubious smile.

"Then let us go!" she suggested earnestly.

They went. How delighted was Thalia's face when she saw the magnificent swimming pool, its great sliding roof thrown back to admit the sunshine, happy girls disporting themselves in the water, and others lying or lolling about on the sides. Thalia's eyes sparkled.

"It—it is like a palace!" she breathed. "Where do we change?"

"Here we are. In these cubicles," Babs explained. "You take this one, Thalia. I'll take the one next to you. Hallo," she added, with a slight frown as another figure appeared, "here's Lydia! Thalia—quickly, into your cubicle!"

She gave Thalia a push, but not before Lydia had seen. A sneering smile wreathed her lips as she sauntered up.

"Hallo, the wild cat bathing?" she asked offensively.

Babs eyed her.

"If you mean Thalia, she is!"

"Thanks!" Lydia drawled. "Then, in that case, I'll postpone my swim."

### Generous—but so Impulsive!



"WELL, here we are—at Study No. 4 at last!"

Barbara Redfern announced cheerily, and glowed with a radiant sense of pleasure as her eyes fondly travelled over the dear old apartment which had been the home of herself, Bessie Bunter and Mabel Lynn ever since they had been in the Fourth Form together. "Like



until the water's changed! I'm rather particular— Oh!" she shrieked.

For suddenly the curtain covering Thalia's cubicle was swept aside and out of that cubicle shot Thalia's folded skirt which, hitting Lydia full in the features, sent her reeling backwards.

For a moment she tottered on the edge of the bath, waving her arms so wildly that a roar of mirth went up.

Lydia just managed to recover her balance. She was crimson. Like most girls who liked teasing others, Lydia hated ridicule herself, and was stung into fury because of it. "I advise you to clear off," said Babs contemptuously.

"Making a pal of her, aren't you?" Lydia cried furiously.

"Quite!" Babs assured her calmly. "And a much greater pleasure it is, Lydia, than to be a pal of yours! Now skip—before I let Thalia loose on you!"

"Whoops! Run, Lydia! Here's the boggy-girl!" shrieked Muriel Bond, as Thalia, rather angrily flushed, looked out through the curtains.

And everybody roared at the sudden jump of alarm which Lydia gave.

Babs looked at Thalia and warningly shook her head. Thalia, about to step out, obviously with the intention of following up her thrown skirt, flushed and paused. Then she withdrew.

Relieved, Babs turned away, hurrying into her cubicle. A few moments later she came out again, to find Thalia, a really strikingly shapely figure in a swim suit of black shot with crimson zigzags, waiting on the side.

A rich tan was her skin, and beneath the firm flesh the strong muscles rippled.

From near by, Lydia looked on with sulky eyes.

"Why, Thalia, that's a ripping swim suit!" Babs cried.

"I knitted it myself," Thalia said simply.

"But I say, wait a minute!" Babs cried. "You've got something on your shoulder."

"Where—there?" Thalia chuckled as she touched a mark which, from a short distance, looked exactly like a brown moth. "That is nothing," she said. "Always have I had that, because I was born with it, you see."

Mabs approached nearer to inspect that curious birthmark. Babs peered at it. Placed on the curve of Thalia's left shoulder, it did look, at first glance, as if it had been painted or tattooed on. Almost perfect was its shape, with its brown wings.

"Well," Babs said. "I've never seen a birthmark like that before! But, Thalia, you're wearing a necklace!"

Thalia smiled.

"This?" she asked. It was a fine gold chain, very much like one which Babs wore with her fob initials, but now, as Thalia drew it out, it proved to hold a gold locket the size of half-a-crown. "This is my mascot," she said simply. "Never do I let this out of my sight."

"But, Thalia, you can't swim with that round your neck! You'll spoil it," Babs said. "Put it in your cubicle, old silly!"

Thalia paused. "Then it will be out of my sight," she argued.

"But nobody will steal it!" Babs cried. "Surely you don't swim with it as a rule?"

"No," Thalia admitted, "but when I swim I take it off and put it on the bank where I can keep my eye on it, you see. Always my foster-mother, Sarah Pascoe, say to me: 'Thalia, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, never let the locket be out of your sight, otherwise you will lose all

your good luck.' And that," Thalia said simply, "I have never done."

Babs shook her head a little. Strange, simple-minded Thalia!

"Well, in that case," she suggested, "why not put it on the edge of the bath here?"

Thalia hesitated. Then she smiled at Babs. Just as though it was utterly impossible to resist Babs anything, she unfastened the locket, and making a small heap of it with her hand, placed it on the very edge of the pool. Then, with a shout, she had taken a header into the bath, and with three magnificent strokes had reached the other side. Babs gasped.

"Oh my hat, what a swimmer! Thalia, race you!" she challenged joyously.

"Come on!" Thalia laughed, lying on her back and thrashing the water with her feet.

Splash! Babs went in and started to swim a length. Everybody watched, everybody's eyes lit with admiration as Thalia started in pursuit. What a swimmer this gipsy girl was!

What a swimmer, indeed! Babs herself was no mean performer. Next to Janet Jordan, indeed, Babs was one of the champions of the lower school. But in half a dozen powerful strokes Thalia had overhauled her, passed her, and when Babs reached the rail, there was Thalia, breathing no more laboriously than usual, a broad smile radiating her face.

"Well, my hat!" Babs gasped. "Thalia, you're a giddy seal!"

"Race back!" Thalia challenged. "I give you five yards start."

Babs grinned. She swam back. Thalia watched her, preparing to surge after her. But she didn't. Instead, she suddenly gave a cry.

"Lydia, you thief—"

For she had seen Lydia Crossendale step swiftly towards her precious locket and scoop it up in her hand. As she shouted, Lydia, with a tantalising laugh, made off to the exit.

"Come back! My locket—!" Thalia

yelled, and fiercely drew herself up out of the bath.

Lydia, at that moment, was just disappearing.

Too late Babs saw Thalia frantically running in pursuit of the snob of the Fourth. She let out a cry:

"Thalia! Thalia, come back! You can't go out in that costume—"

### The Search in Study No. 1



IT was doubtful if Thalia Pascoe heard Babs' cry. It was certainly obvious that the rules governing the wearing of bathing suits anywhere but in the pool she was utterly oblivious.

Leaving a stream of water behind her, she flashed through the door.

"Thief, thief!" she cried. "Come back!"

Lydia was at the head of the stairs which led into the school. Just for an instant she paused to make a challenging face at her pursuer, then sprinted.

Thalia breathed fury.

Up the stairs she went three at a time, leaving a trail of water from her soaked costume. Lydia, looking a little scared, had turned into the Fourth Form corridor. After her went Thalia, gaining on her at every step. Lydia reached the Common-room. Breathlessly she staggered into it, slamming the door behind her.

"Don't let that wildcat come in!" she cried.

There were perhaps twenty girls in the Common-room, all cheerily exchanging the usual first-day greetings as they stood or sat about. They stared at Lydia.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Bridget O'Toole asked.

"Keep her out!" screamed Lydia. "Oh dear, where's the key of this door?"

"On the outside, chump!"



ALONG the edge of the swimming bath Lydia Crossendale rushed, the gold locket in her grasp. Thalia, in the water, saw her and cried out in fury. "Come back! My locket—" On sped Lydia, grinning mockingly.

A gasp went up then as Lydia, frantically thrusting her weight against the door to hold it against the expected attack from the corridor, went reeling back as the door burst open. Thalia, a striking figure in her white-hot fury, stood there.

"Keep her off!" howled Lydia. She evaded the gipsy girl's clutching fingers, and dodged behind June Merrett, Brenda Fallace, and Clara Trevlyn, who stood in a group.

On came Thalia. Wild horses would not have stopped her now. As the stolid, beefy Brenda, easily the strongest girl in the Form, and Lydia's best friend, stood in front of her, Thalia glared.

"Stand aside!"

"Supposing I don't?" Brenda said truculently.

"Very well," Thalia said, and clasping defiant Brenda round the waist swung her with a surprising display of strength to one side. Then, with a cry, she had seized Lydia, was clutching her arm. "Give me my locket!"

"No, hang you!" Lydia panted. "I won't! Go away, wildcat!"

Her voice rose to a shriek as Thalia's hand closed on her own.

Clara Trevlyn stepped forward.

"Thalia, I say—" she cried.

"Give it to me, Lydia!" panted Thalia.

"Let go—let go!"

Then—crash! The door came open again. Rona Fox came striding in.

"What's this?" she cried. "My hat, that gipsy girl again! Thalia! How dare you?"

"She's got my locket!" Thalia panted.

"What? Lydia—"

Lydia hastily dropped the locket into her pocket. With a prefect on the scene she felt braver and more assured.

"She's just mad! I—I've never seen her locket!"

"That is a lie!" cried Thalia, her chest heaving.

"Wait a minute!" Rona snapped, and stepped between them. "Sure you haven't got that locket, Lydia?"

"Quite!" Lydia said.

"Right! Then get out! No, not you!" she added, seizing Thalia as she would have followed. "You've got something to answer for, my girl. What do you mean, in the first place, by coming into the school in a wet swimming suit?"

"She took my locket!" Thalia panted.

"Lydia has said—" Rona started as she saw the butterfly birthmark.

"What's that?"

"Let me go and get my locket!" Thalia cried, and flamed round, and for a moment looked so frantically ready to strike the prefect that Clara, coming forward, caught her hand with a quick, warning shake of the head.

And just to make matters more complicated, the door at that moment burst open, and in came Babs and Mabs, each having hastily thrown a wrap over their swim-suits.

"Oh, great goodness!" Babs cried. "Thalia, what's the matter?"

"Lydia! She's stolen my locket!" Thalia said furiously. "I saw her! I chased her here, but this girl has let her go, and now she is stopping me from going after her. Rona, please!" she cried desperately.

"No, wait a minute!" Rona was still staring at the birthmark. "Just control yourself, you wild thing! Lydia denied having your locket. Lydia's word against a gipsy girl's word is good enough for me, I reckon!"

"Rona, that's beastly!" Babs broke out.

"Is it? Take twenty lines for insulting a prefect!" Rona snapped.

"And you, gipsy girl, you can take fifty for coming into the Common-room dressed like that. And you can take a further fifty for making a shindy."

Thalia quivered.

"And you let Lydia go free?"

"As far as I can see, there's nothing against Lydia," Rona answered calmly.

"There is against you. Anyway, don't argue with me. Get off and do those lines. I shall expect them before call-over."

"I won't!"

"Thalia, please!" Babs begged, putting a hand on her arm.

"My locket—"

"If Lydia's got it, I'll get that for you, too," Babs quietly promised.

Thalia paused. But her glance was angry and bitter as she glared at Rona.

"I think," Thalia said fiercely, "I hate you, Rona Fox! Yes, even as I hate Lydia Crossendale! You are a—"

"Thalia!" Babs cried sharply. "Oh, my goodness, come away—"

Almost desperately she tugged at the gipsy girl's arm. With Thalia still glowering and fuming, she led her out. Then she nodded to Mabs.

"Mabs, cut off and get the clothes," she said. "Now, Thalia, you've got to listen to me." She put on a stern expression as she led the way into Study No. 4. "I warned you it was against the rules to go out of the swimming pool in your bathing dress!"

"Yes, Babs—I—I am sorry," Thalia said, biting her lip. "But what would you have me do when I saw that girl taking my locket?"

"Lydia," Babs said, "only did it to annoy you, goose! And don't you realise that every time you do things like this they are being reported to Miss Charmant, and don't you realise that when Miss Charmant reports them back to Primmy, as it's her duty to do, it's all going to tell against you? But let's try to put things right for you. What exactly happened?"

Thalia told her.

"All right," Babs said, "then leave this to me. When we've dressed I'll go and see Lydia—oh, here's Mabs! Clothes in the dormitory, Mabs?" she asked genially, and as Mabs nodded she caught the gipsy girl's arm. "Now come along, Thalia, old thing."

Thalia gulped. But she suffered herself to be led up to the dormitory. There, a strangely grim look on her face, she changed back into her clothes. Babs smiled.

"Now that's better," she said. Thalia briefly nodded.

"Now," Babs said, "we'll go back to the study. And then, Thalia, you'll just sit down and do your lines."

"Why should I do them?" Thalia passionately broke out. "Why should I be punished and you be punished when that girl—"

"Thalia, it's one of the things you've just got to knuckle under to," Babs said gently. "Please do as I tell you, and you'll find everything will come all right! Thalia, promise me you'll do those lines?" she added seriously.

Thalia gulped.

"I—"

"Promise?" Babs prompted.

"Well—oh, yes, then!"

Babs smiled, relieved. She took her back to the study. There, while Thalia watched, she got out pen, ink, and paper and seated the gipsy girl before them. She gave her one line to copy out.

"Now, Thalia, do them," she smiled. Thalia nodded. Babs went out. Then suddenly sat back. No, no, no! She wouldn't do them! It wasn't right! It wasn't fair. Why should she be punished for the prank of Lydia and the spite of Rona Fox? Both the lines!

But Babs—she had promised Babs. Meantime Babs, making her way towards Study No. 1, which Lydia shared with Rosa Rodworth and Freda Ferriers, was stopped by Miss Charmant. Miss Charmant's face was a little peculiar.

"Oh, Barbara, is Thalia about?"

"She's in her study doing lines, Miss Charmant," Babs said. "If you want her, though—"

"No. If she's working, let her alone," Miss Charmant said. "In the meantime, Barbara, I am rather disturbed by the flow of reports which are pouring in against her. I'd like to have another word with you if you can spare the time. Would you come along to my study?"

Babs, reflecting that Lydia could wait for a few more minutes, agreed. Off they went together.

While in Study No. 4 Thalia glared at the sheet of paper in front of her, tried again to write, and felt a sort of tickling sensation in her throat as she did so. It was just impossible—impossible! She would know no peace of mind until once again she had her precious locket.

Crash! went the chair as it was thrown back. Almost with a jump Thalia had leapt to her feet.

At a run she flew to Study No. 1. She did not knock at the door. She flung it open. Then she glared. For Study No. 1 was untenanted.

She saw Lydia's desk, with Lydia's neat monogram inlaid upon it. Tempestuously she crossed towards it. Up went the lid, revealing Lydia's newly arranged new-term things.

Thalia's eyes smouldered. Was her locket here?

She rummaged among the things. They got in her way. With sudden recklessness, the fever of the search upon her, she tossed them to one side. With a crash and a thud books and pencils and paper fell unheeded on the floor, and crash followed crash in swift succession as Thalia's feverish anxiety grew. Her locket—her locket! Would she never—

There was a pile of articles round her feet now. Still the locket had not come to light. Out went a pencil-box.

And then—

"Ah!" breathed Thalia.

And trembling, her hand darted towards the folded chain which lay at the very bottom of the desk. She was in the act of raising it when there was a step outside the door.

Too late, Thalia realised the mess she had made. She turned.

Lydia Crossendale, fury growing on her face, stood in the doorway—and with her was Rona Fox!

"Now, Thalia, do them," she smiled. Thalia nodded. Babs went out. Savagely she dipped her pen in the ink, and then suddenly sat back. No, no, no! She wouldn't do them! It wasn't right! It wasn't fair. Why should she be punished for the prank of Lydia and the spite of Rona Fox? Both the lines!

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### A Strange Girl Indeed!



"YOU—you gipsy thief!" Lydia cried. "You spiteful wretch!

Look at my things!"

"Thalia, what are you doing here?" Rona Fox demanded hotly.

Thalia straightened.

"I came to find what was mine!" she said proudly. "I came because this girl told you lies! And," she added,



with a satisfied smile, "I have found it, as I expected. See, here it is!"

"Look at my things!" shrieked Lydia.

Rona's eyes flickered as she eyed the locket.

"What is it?"

"My locket! Always have I worn it until this girl stole it. Now I have it back and all is well."

"I see!" Rona said. "So you did take that locket, Lydia?"

"Well, it was only a joke," Lydia cried. "But look—"

"You had no right to play such a joke. That will cost you a hundred lines!" And as Lydia glared, Thalia scornfully smiled. "But you, Thalia—this is going too far," Rona said. "You will come with me to Miss Charmant."

Thalia stared.

"Is that necessary?" she asked. "Now that I have my locket again? I will remain and put back Lydia's things."

"You will come," Rona rapped, "to Miss Charmant. You're not getting out of it as easily as all that. At this rate," Rona went on, "you look like getting chucked out of the school! Now come."

Thalia bent her head. Lydia sneered. But without another word she went out, crestfallenly following the prefect as she led the way. They reached Miss Charmant's study just as the door opened and Babs came out.

"I say, what's the matter?" she cried. "Thalia, what's happened—"

"Out of the way, Barbara," snapped Rona. "I'm taking Thalia to Miss Charmant!"

"But why?" Babs asked. "Thalia, what have you done?"

Thalia, meeting her questioning gaze, flung up her head.

"I did nothing but search for my own property," she stated defiantly. "Lydia took my locket—I take it back! I—"

And then she fell back as the door opened and Miss Charmant herself appeared.

"Please do make a little less noise here," she said. "Rona, what is the matter?"

Rona commenced to explain. Miss Charmant, her face grave, nodded and with a rather angry gesture invited prefect and culprit into the study.

Outside Babs stood, a little sick at heart, anxiety heavy within her as she listened to the voices on the other side of the door. Oh, Thalia, you wild, silly, impetuous creature! Why can't you see that are heading for utter disaster?

Dinner bell rang. Still Babs waited. A few moments later Thalia, her face contrite, came out. She paused as she saw Babs.

"Babs, I—I'm sorry," she muttered. "What did Miss Charmant say?"

Babs asked quickly. Thalia flushed.

"She warned me! That is all. But Babs, it is all right now," she added earnestly, "because I have that which belonged to me and I am happy. No more will I be a bad girl. Forgive me—please!"

Babs forgave her—what else could she do? Together they went into dinner—not a very well attended meal on the first day of term, for a great many girls had already lunched on the journey, and a great many others had still to arrive.

Lydia was not there, thank goodness, and Thalia, anxiety banished now, seemed happy enough. After dinner Clara, who, as junior sports captain, believed in getting into action as soon as possible, invited the gipsy girl to practise at the cricket nets, and though

Thalia was not too keen on the idea of being parted from her beloved Babs, she went willingly enough at Babs' request. Babs herself, meanwhile, as junior school captain, had a hundred and one duties to perform.

First, there were the lines she had collected mainly through Thalia. With a sigh she got through those, then went round to check up the new arrivals, note requirements, collect medical certificates, and note shoes for mending. After that there was a captain's conference in the headmistress' study, with Miss Bullivant presiding in Miss Primrose's absence, notices to be posted and new-term books to be distributed in Form-room desks.

Then came tea—the same cheery old meal in Study No. 4 with Thalia, flushed and radiant after her cricket practice, a really delightful companion. Only one more duty remained then for Babs to do.

That was to collect impositions in the junior school.

Not a hard job that, for the only impositions that day had been those given to herself, Lydia, and Thalia. But when she tackled Thalia on the subject of lines Thalia hung her head and blushed.

"Oh, Babs, I—I'm sorry—"

"You mean," Babs asked, "you haven't done your lines, Thalia?"

"N-no!"

Babs eyed her seriously. "You didn't do them because you didn't want to do them?" she accused. "My, but, Thalia, don't you realise you're heading for trouble? And you promised me, remember?"

Thalia was tongue-tied. Babs gave a despairing shake of the head.

"Thalia, I'm sorry, too; I do hate to keep on nagging," she said. "I like you. I want to do my best for you. But I can't do my best for you if you won't help yourself. And I think you might have kept your promise."

Thalia bit her lip.

"I—I'm sorry," she stammered. "Babs, you—you're not cross with me?"

"But I am. Thalia—jolly cross!" Babs said. "I really think—here, I say, what's the matter?" she added, in surprised alarm.

For Thalia, staring at her for one moment with wide and swimming eyes, had suddenly burst into tears like some sensitive little Second Former!

## Mystery Thief!



**S**TRANGE girl, this Thalia, so assured and unafraid, and yet so shrinkingly sensitive to Babs' reproofs.

It took Babs some time to quieten her. She felt shaken herself at the realisation of the affection Thalia had for her.

"Now, now!" she coaxed. "Thalia, give over—please! Dash it, you'll have me crying next, and you wouldn't like that, would you?"

"N-no!" Thalia gulped. "But—oh, Babs, say that you are not cross with me!"

"No, Thalia, not now! Forget it, shall we? But you will remember, won't you, dear, that when you give a promise it must be kept?"

"Never, never shall I forget it," Thalia said vehemently.

"And you will try to toe the line?"

"Oh, Babs, if it makes you happy—yes!" Thalia said. "But it would not have been so if Lydia and Rona had treated me fairly, and I had not lost my locket. But see, now I get to my

lines," she said eagerly. "This time I will do them, Babs."

Babs laughed. How impossible it was to remain really angry with this impulsive girl! Well, thank goodness there was still time to get the lines in, and leaving Thalia earnestly getting on with them, she went along to Lydia's study. Lydia was there, and, against rules, was smoking a cigarette. She shrugged when Babs asked for the lines.

"I'll do 'em to-morrow."

"You know," Babs warned, "Rona will ask for them?"

Again Lydia shrugged. She seemed singularly indifferent.

"Never mind. I'll do them to-morrow, I tell you. Get back and kowtow to your gipsy gutter brat!" she sneered.

Babs compressed her lips. But she did not rise to the bait of the quarrel which Lydia was offering. She closed the door and went back to Thalia.

That girl was working hard. Babs waited until she had finished her lines, and then left them, with her own, in Rona's study.

Afterwards, Clara Trevlyn came along with the suggestion that Thalia should resume cricket practice. Thalia eagerly agreed. Never in her life had she played an organised game. Cricket was something new to her. More often than not she missed the ball, but when she did hit, the power she put behind her stroke was something to amaze.

Call-over came then, and after call-over, supper. After supper came bed, and Thalia, happy, laughing, utterly in her element, treated a delighted Fourth Form to an exhibition of hand-springs on the floor of the dormitory, and then succeeded that by balancing upside down on the handrails of the beds. In admiration and some awe, the Fourth Form watched that feat.

"My aunt, what a giddy acrobat!" Clara chortled. "Know any more tricks, Thalia?"

"Plenty! Now I'll show you this one!" Thalia laughed, and, clearing a space, made a running leap at her bed. Up she leapt, alighting on the rail with both feet, and then, swaying until she got her balance, slowly lifted one leg and placed it round her neck. An involuntary cheer went up.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Do it again, Thalia!"

"Swank!" Lydia Crossendale sniffed.

Thalia laughed. She looked at Babs as she dropped to the floor. Then, leaping again on to the bedrail, she swung backwards, and balancing magnificently, caught the rail between her feet with both hands.

"Say, I guess that girl's just made of indiarubber," Leila Carroll murmured. "Sure would earn a fortune on the films."

Lydia sneered again. Of them all she was the only one watching with bitter jealousy on her face. Swiftly she looked round.

All attention was concentrated upon Thalia—attention which, strictly speaking, should have been fixed on getting into bed, for the moment of "lights out" was perilously near. For the time being, however, the Fourth had forgotten their rules in this absorbing spectacle.

Lydia, near a wash-basin, grabbed the soap.

With fascinated gaze, the Fourth watched Thalia. Slowly she lifted one hand from the rail. After it followed one foot, and she was poised delicately on one toe when Lydia threw the soap. Full in the back it hit Thalia, and the shock of it caused her to lose her balance. With a crash she came down.

And immediately everybody swung upon Lydia.

"Lydia, you mean cat——"

"You awful thing!"

"You—— I say, look out!" shrieked Mabel Lynn.

Thalia had sprung to her feet, and, her face red with the fury that consumed her, was rushing across the floor at Lydia.

With alarm rising in her face, Lydia twisted and ducked. By a hair-breadth Thalia's clutching fingers missed her shoulder, and Thalia, carried by the momentum of her own rush, crashed against a washstand. There was a cry.

"Look out——"

"My hat!"

The glass shelf perched above the washstand had shattered. There was a rain of broken glass, accompanied by an alarming crash as the shelf and its contents smashed into smithereens into the basin itself.

And at the same moment there was a hurried cry.

"Cave!"

But it was too late. The door had opened, and standing there, her acid face wrathful and stern, was Miss Bullivant, the mathematics mistress.

"Order!" she snapped. "Is this the way you all behave when you are supposed to be in bed? Every one of you will take fifty lines!"

A sulky murmur went up from the Fourth.

"And you, girl"—Miss Bullivant swung upon Thalia—"you will pay for the damage, which shall be reported to Miss Priurose. You will take a hundred lines. Now go to bed."

Thalia clenched her hands. It seemed that she was about to make some retort, but swiftly Babs caught her wrist.

"Thalia, come on!" she said quietly.

She led the gipsy girl back to her bed. Then there was a step outside the door, and Rona Fox joined Miss Bullivant.

Miss Bullivant nodded to her.

"Rona, take charge here. Please turn out the lights," she instructed.

The prefect smiled.

"Very well, Miss Bullivant. Now, everybody, hurry up!" she added authoritatively. "Any girl not in bed within three minutes will get twenty lines."

The girls undressed, though Babs noticed that Rona kept her eyes full upon Thalia. Very quickly yet very angrily Thalia undressed, and, donning her pyjamas, buttoned her precious locket under her pyjama top, and climbed into bed. Rona turned out the lights.

"And no nonsense!" she warned.

"Good-night!"

She went out. Immediately there was a buzz.

"Fifty lines! A nice start to the new term, I must say!" Rosa Rodworth grumbled. "Lydia, you cat, that's your fault!"

"Rats!" came Lydia's retort. "It was your own! If you hadn't been so jolly busy watching that girl at her cheap tricks, you'd all have been in bed."

"But you threw the soap," Mabs accused.

"No, I didn't; it slipped!" Lydia lied unblushingly.

"I saw you!" cried Thalia.

"Yes? And who," Lydia sneered, "is going to take your word, gipsy?" In a moment Thalia had sat up in bed.

"Thalia, bob down!" Babs cried desperately. "We don't want Rona or the Bull back on the scene. And please, everybody, be quiet! Next

time," she warned, "it will be a detention."

Thalia sank back. The Form, realising that argument was bound to provoke a new upset, settled down, too.

One by one the girls dropped off to sleep and silence reigned in the dormitory. For an hour the Fourth Form slept. Then suddenly there was a smothered chuckle, the door creaked open, and the whole dormitory became full of other girls, each carrying a pillow. From Flora Cann, captain of the Lower Fifth and the leader of those raiders, came a gurgle.

"Got 'em! Go it, Fifth!"

"Hurrah!"

The Fifth advanced. Too late the Fourth, taken by surprise, awoke. Smack, smack, smack, came the sound of wielded pillows, followed by gasps.

Babs, jerked out of her slumbers by the pillow which smote down upon her head, rolled, quick as thought, out of her bed on the opposite side, grabbing for her own pillow as she did so. From all the dormitory came sounds of thudding strife.

Surprised by the Fifth's swift raid as they were, the Fourth were now recovering. It was more or less understood that on these occasions no one was to cry out, nobody to turn on a light for fear of attracting a mistress, and grimly in the darkness the two Forms went at it.

Babs, rallying from a new blow, lustily smote back and had the satisfaction of sweeping her opponent across Mabel Lynn's bed. Then, suddenly, from Thalia's bed, came a shout.

"My locket!"

Babs started. In the darkness she saw the back of the girl who was bending over Thalia.

The figure turned, kicking out with her foot at Thalia. Thalia went back. Babs, plunging forward, made a grab at the assailant as she turned. She caught something and desperately hauled back. The unknown girl jerked forward at the same time. There came a tearing sound and a silky piece of material was left in Babs' hands. Then from Thalia:

"My locket, my locket! It has been stolen!"

"Shut up!" hissed somebody.

"I want my locket!" Thalia insisted.

"Thalia, for goodness' sake——" Babs

panted.

"It has been stolen!" Thalia cried frantically. "Somebody here has got it!"

And in a perfect frenzy she hurled herself among the pillow-fighting rivals, and ruthlessly forcing her way through them reached the door, turned the key, and then switched on the electric light. Girls, dismayed and startled, blinked.

"Oh, my hat! Come on, Fifth!" gasped Flora Cann.

"Turn that light out, you fool!" cried Rosa Rodworth.

Thalia stood with her back to the door. Her face was fierce then.

"Somebody has stolen my locket!" she cried. "I want my locket! Nobody leaves this room until it is returned."

"Who's got her locket?" Babs cried.

"Nobody!" cried Lydia Crossendale.

"You've got it!" Thalia accused.

"You took it before, and——"

"But, Thalia—— Oh, my goodness, open the door!" Babs cried.

For once, however, Thalia was even deaf to Babs.

"I want my locket back."

"Oh, rats! Come on!" Georgina

Skeppington of the Fifth cried. "Rush

her!"

There were nods. Everybody was on

tenterhooks then. The two unwritten rules of pillow fighting had been disobeyed—noise and lights—and it could only be a matter of moments now before a mistress was on the scene. Bullheadedly, Georgina rushed at Thalia, but Thalia, bracing herself, met the attack and sent Georgina reeling back across a bed.

"My hat, the girl's as strong as a horse!" Flora gasped. "Thalia, you idiot, step aside from that door."

But even as she spoke there came footsteps in the corridor outside, accompanied by Miss Bullivant's angry voice. Then the door rattled.

"Open this door."

A blank and dismayed silence fell. "Thalia, open it!" Babs cried angrily. "Quickly!"

Thalia turned. It seemed to dawn upon her too late what she had done. Just one look she gave at Babs; then, without another word, twisted the key in the lock. Miss Bullivant, accompanied by Rona Fox, stormed in.

"Stand still, everybody!" she rapped. "So—a pillow fight! Rona, take every girl's name in this room!"

"Yes, Miss Bullivant," Rona purred.

"And to-morrow, Rona," Miss Bullivant said grimly, "you may take them all in special detention. Who put this light on?" she added.

"I did!" Thalia confessed. "Lydia has stolen my locket!"

"What?"

"Miss Bullivant, I haven't!" cried Lydia desperately.

"She has!" Thalia panted. "She hit me in the chest and then stole the locket from my neck while I was off my balance! Look!" she cried, and showed her pyjama-top where it had been torn open.

Miss Bullivant's eyes glimmered.

"Lydia——"

"Miss Bullivant, I didn't!" Lydia

cried.

"Then who did?" raved Thalia. "It must be given to me—now!"

Miss Bullivant's lips compressed.

"Thalia, please!" she said curtly.

"What an unreasonable girl you are! Rest assured your locket shall be found, but if Lydia protests that she did not take it, I must, in the absence of definite proof, take her word. You did not see Lydia?"

"She was near," Thalia said.

"And so," Lydia sneered, "was Barbara Redfern!"

"That is enough!" Miss Bullivant snapped. "Rona, you have the names? Thank you! The Fifth will quietly file back to their own dormitory," she commanded. "You other girls will get to bed. And if," Miss Bullivant rumbled, "there is the faintest further disturbance from either dormitory, I shall cancel your pocket-money allowances this week-end! Now, please, go to sleep!"

Sulky and bitter were the faces which watched her. With a glare at Thalia, the Fifth went out. Glowering and fed-up, the Fourth climbed back into bed. There was a moment of deep and foreboding silence after Miss Bullivant departed.

Then the storm broke.

"Thalia, you sneak——"

"Thalia, you cat——"

"If it hadn't been for you we should never have got caught!"

"And now," Lydia said bitterly, "we've got detention! Fifty lines each and detention—all thanks to that gipsy rotter!"

"Oh, go to sleep!" snapped Babs.

"You'd have been upset if somebody had wrenched a locket from—— Oh, goodness, cave, everybody! Somebody coming!"



And in a flash Babs dived under the sheets as the door opened again and Miss Bullivant looked into the room. After that there was silence—but it was a silence of utter disgust. The Fourth as a whole were not interested in the fate of Thalia Pascoc's locket, but not in a hurry would they either forgive or forget that the gipsy girl had been the cause of them earning the first detention of the term. The Form, in fact, were rather fed-up with Thalia Pascoc.

**A Discovery about the Raid!**



**T**HEY were still fed-up when morning came.

Few girls spoke to Thalia Pascoc during the dressing operations of early morning, and Thalia, for her part, did not attempt to speak to them. She looked a little white, most terrifically worried, and the only girl she seemed to have eyes for was Barbara Redfern. But without a word she left the dormitory immediately she was dressed.

Babs was about to follow her when her gaze fell upon a rumpled article which reposed on her bed. It was part of a sash of blue silk ornamented with white flowers—and one which Babs had never seen before. Curiously she picked it up. It was a dressing-gown sash undoubtedly, but where the dickens—And then, with a start, she remembered whence it had come! It was the silken fragment she had snatched from Thalia's unknown assailant of last night.

"Hallo!" Babs breathed, struck by a sense of discovery.

She glanced instinctively towards Lydia. Lydia was still wearing her dressing-gown—a showy affair of crimson silk. Obviously the sash did not belong to her. Neither did it belong to any other member of the Fourth. Must, then, belong to one of the Fifth. She'd find the owner later.

And perhaps, she thought, if she discovered that she'd also find the girl who had taken Thalia's precious locket.

Quickly she tucked the belt into her pocket and went off in search of her gipsy friend. But it was not until breakfast that she saw Thalia again, still looking worried—and a trifle sulky, too.

After breakfast she settled down with Babs and Mabs and Bessie to work on her lines. But again she said nothing, though Babs, looking up now and again, caught a yearning expression on her face. After assembly it was Babs' duty to collect those lines and deliver them to Rona Fox, who happened to be duty prefect for the day. Everyone, as it happened, had done them this time—except one girl.

That girl was Lydia Crossendale. But Lydia, strangely enough, seemed to be in no wise concerned.

"Oh, don't worry!" she said airily. "Tell Rona I'll let her have them later."

Strangely Babs gazed at her. "You know I'll have to report you?" Lydia shrugged.

"O.K.!" she said indifferently. "You have my permission. Anyway, I'll get it in the neck, not you," she added, with a scowl. "Now buzz off!"

Babs "buzzed off," wondering a little. Though Lydia, as a rule, was contemptuous of discipline, she was never openly defiant of authority like that. Lines in hand, she went to Rona's study, where Rona was just finishing her breakfast. Rona nodded.

"All right, put those there," she said.

"Are they complete?"

Babs hesitated.

"Well, practically."

"What do you mean, practically? Somebody not finished?"

"Well, yes." Babs flushed, hating, even with Lydia's permission, to report, but seeing now that report was inevitable. "Lydia, she—she's not done hers."

Rona's amber-coloured eyes flickered. "Oh!" she said. "All right, leave them there."

Babs went out, wondering at the calm way in which Rona had accepted the non-appearance of Lydia's lines. She hadn't shown the faintest trace of annoyance. Very odd that.

Babs hurried back to Study No. 4. Thalia was there—and Thalia, for the first time since rising-bell that morning, was alone. Her face cleared a little as she saw Babs.

"Oh, Babs, I—I—do you think I've been dreadful?" she faltered. "You've hardly spoken to me this morning."

way. I've an idea that the girl who took your locket belongs to the Fifth. Wait till I've made inquiries there."

Not very satisfied did Thalia look, but she nodded. Still worried, she went into the class-room with Babs, there to be met by a battery of glares from the majority of the Form.

Fortunately, however, the morning passed without untoward incident, and as soon as break came Babs, armed with the dressing-gown sash, went off to the Lower Fifth Common-room.

She found there as grumpy a crowd of girls as she had left in the Fourth. They were all moaning about their bad luck in being confined to special detention that afternoon.

But when she displayed the sash nobody owned it, and Flora Cann, handling it, shook her head.

"None of us was wearing a gown of this material; I'm sure of it."

Babs frowned.

"Well, it certainly doesn't belong to a Fourth Former," she announced.



**BABS** stared in dismay at the gipsy girl. "You mean," she asked, "you haven't done your lines?" Thalia shook her head. "My hat!" cried Babs. "Thalia, don't you realise you're heading for trouble? And you promised me, remember."

"Chance would be a fine thing," Babs retorted. "Why have you been dodging me?"

"I—I thought you might be cross with me," Thalia mumbled, hanging her head. "Babs, I meant to be careful—honestly. But when Lydia took my locket again—"

"Thalia, you don't seriously believe it was Lydia?"

"But who else could it be? It was Lydia! She meant to steal it. And she's got it now!" she added, a hint of passion in her voice.

"Thalia, you can't be sure," Babs pointed out.

The gipsy girl's face set with a dogged expression.

"I am sure," she said. "And if she won't give it back—"

"Now, listen!" cut in Babs. "You know what a good record here means for you, and Thalia, I'm trying to help you to get one. So please don't say anything to Lydia," she pleaded. "Leave me to work this out my own

"Then," Flora said with a shrug, "it must have got there by accident. Anyway, we're fed up to the teeth with the very mention of the raid. We only wish now that we'd let you carry out your intention to raid us!"

Babs blinked.

"Our intention! What do you mean?"

"Well, you planned to raid us at ten, didn't you?" Flora asked.

"No," Babs replied. "What made you think that?"

"But—" Flora stared. "Here, wait a minute!" she added, and fished in her pocket. Then she produced for Babs' inspection a crumpled card on which was written, in neat black capitals, the words:

**"DO YOU KNOW THE FOURTH ARE PLANNING TO RAID YOU AT 10.30 TO-NIGHT?"**

"That was pushed under our dormitory door when we were undressing,"

Flora stated, "and—well, you can guess how we re-acted. We thought, you see, that instead of you giving us the surprise, we'd give you one."

"And we," Babs said, "never even planned the surprise—never even thought of it, in fact. Funny, isn't it?"

"Oh, frightfully comic!" Flora scoffed. "Especially when it landed us all in for detention—thanks to that gipsy pal of yours! Somebody playing a joke, eh?" she asked keenly.

Babs nodded. Somebody, obviously, had played a joke. Or was it just a joke? Again she looked at the sash, now established to belong neither to Fourth nor Fifth. The girl who had worn it, however, had most certainly been in the raid.

But that girl had not been in the raid for the purpose of joining in either a Fourth or Fifth victory.

Could she—and Babs herself felt the theory rather wild—have artfully contrived that raid so that she could seize the opportunity of snatching the gipsy girl's precious locket?

### Luck for Lydia—or was it?



**B**ARBARA REDFERN was still brooding upon that point when she went into

detention that afternoon with the rest of the Form. Thalia was already there,

rather white-faced and subdued.

"All here?" Babs asked.

"All here, I guess, except Lydia," Leila Carroll said. "That girl sure is asking for trouble! She's gone out for the afternoon."

"But she knew she was in detention?" Babs cried.

"I guess so. Still, she doesn't seem—Cave!" Leila whispered hurriedly. "Rona!"

Rona it was, coming in with a smirk on her face. They all stood to attention while her eyes rapidly skimmed the class.

"Right-ho! Now listen to your names," she said. "Give me the detention register, Barbara."

Babs handed over the register. One by one the names were called out. As she came to Lydia's, however, Rona, apparently by accident, dropped her handkerchief, and again, by accident, missed Lydia's name altogether when she resumed calling the roll.

The Fourth blinked at each other. What luck for Lydia, they thought.

But Babs, watching, wondered. Had Rona really missed Lydia's name by accident? Her mind went to the lines which Lydia had not attempted to do. Was there an understanding between Rona and Lydia?

And if an understanding, why?

Not without reason, Babs' thoughts turned to Thalia.

Both Rona and Lydia had shown their dislike of Thalia. Both, in their own ways, had tried to make things as awkward as possible for the undisciplined gipsy girl. Was that their common bond—baiting Thalia? But why should Rona want to bait her?

"Hallo, what have I got hold of here?" Babs asked herself.

She thought of the dressing-gown sash; she thought of the unknown plotter who had tricked the Fifth into making a raid so that she could attach herself unknown to the party. Had Rona been that mysterious one? Was the owner of that sash really Rona, who, for some reason, wanted to get hold of Thalia's locket?

The question was—how to prove that the sash belonged to Rona?

"Only one way to do that," Babs musingly told herself. "Catch Rona in the dressing-gown to which the sash belongs. A night operation, Babs, old scout."

Detention—a dreary and wearying task—dragged to its end at last. As soon as it was over, Babs got hold of Bessie Bunter.

"Bessie, game for a lark to-night?" Her plump studymate blinked.

"What sort of lark?"

"Just a lark," Babs said. "A sort of joke on Rona. I want you to do a spot of ventriloquising after lights out. And if," Babs promised, "you bring it off O.K., I'll let you have the remains of the iced cake I brought back from home with me."

Bessie's eyes brightened behind her thick spectacles.

"H'm! Well, of course, Babs, I'd do it for nothing—but—but you really mean it about the cake?"

Babs grinned.

"Of course, you goose!"

"Then," Bessie smirked with great satisfaction, "just tell me what you want to do."

### MEANTIME—WHAT OF Thalia?

Outwardly, she was the quietest and most obedient girl in detention that afternoon. But inwardly Thalia was a battleground of emotions.

Those emotions were centred chiefly around Lydia Crossendale—Lydia who, she had convinced herself now, had played her a most spiteful trick by stealing her treasured locket. More than that, while she and the rest of the Form worked under the mocking eye of Rona Fox, Lydia was out enjoying herself—Lydia, who was the real cause of her own and the others' punishment! Thalia felt her hate for Lydia boiling over.

But although she knew that the Form blamed her for this detention, she said nothing. Thalia was making great efforts to hold herself in check. Already the report to be given to Miss Primrose when she returned was bad enough. For her own sake, she must not make that report worse.

When the order to dismiss came, Thalia hurried from the room. She went straight down to the school gates and there took up her stand. She was going to be the first to talk to Lydia Crossendale when she arrived.

And this time, if Lydia failed to tell her where that locket was—

Thalia's darkly handsome face was very grim.

Hardly ten minutes had passed when a taxi came bowling up the road, and Thalia's hands clenched when she saw the hood was down, revealing Lydia and another girl she did not know.

The other girl was Laura Levensden, a rather smart London friend with whom Lydia had recently chummed up, and who had come to live in the Court-field district. Lydia loved smart friends; and smart friends from London were her idea of Society's cream.

Thalia drew back. She heard Lydia eagerly talking.

"And to-night, Laura—you're sure it's to-night?"

"To-night," Laura chuckled, "at the dance hall. Wear your best fancy dress—that harlequin thing—and I'll fix it with the M.C. that you get a prize. Pal of mine, you know. What time will you be there?"

"About eleven," Lydia said. "That do?"

"Yes; but don't make it later, will you? The show's over at midnight, you know."

Thalia's lips curled in scorn. She guessed from that conversation what was being planned, and she knew enough now about the rules of Cliff House to guess that it was dead against them. Lydia was arranging to attend a fancy-dress dance—and to do that, of course, she had to break bounds.

"I'll be there," Lydia laughed, and stood in the road, waving, as the taxi bowled off; and then, turning, she saw Thalia and gave a violent start. "You!" she cried. "You—you beastly eavesdropper! What do you mean by spying on me?"

Thalia advanced towards her. "I am not spying on you," she retorted, but she paused, and very queerly, right in the middle of that sentence, she gazed at the snob of the Fourth as though a sudden idea had come into her head. "I am not spying and I am not listening," she stated, "because I am not interested in your doings. But I am interested in my locket, and you still have that locket. Will you not now tell me where it is?"

Lydia regarded her with a bitter sneer.

"After you've chucked my things about?" she asked. "After you follow me about and listen and spy? Do you think I'd give you your locket even if I did know where it is?"

"You have hidden it!" Thalia accused.

Lydia broke into a short laugh.

"Have I? Well, jolly well find it—if you can!" She scowled. "And I hope, if you carry on with the same old methods, it will end in your getting kicked out! All right," she added, hastily backing, as Thalia, hands clenched, took a step towards her.

But Thalia paused, and the sudden stormy, passionate look in her face disappeared. She turned on her heel.

"Thalia, I say—Thalia—" Lydia said, feeling somehow uneasy and uncertain at that strange, unexpected quietness. "Thalia—"

With a quick step Thalia continued on her way back to school.

### Expulsion—Thanks to Thalia!



**M**UM—my hat! Lydia, where are you going?" Barbara Redfern breathed.

"Shut up and mind your own business!" Lydia

Crossendale retorted.

It was dark in the Fourth Form dormitory, but not sufficiently so to hide Lydia's actions or to hide that glittering harlequin's costume she was struggling on to her slim form.

Babs shrugged. Strictly speaking, she should have prevented Lydia going out. But that meant reporting the girl and getting her into big trouble.

"All right. I'm asleep," she said.

Lydia grunted. She was not afraid of Babs. Babs, she knew, would not report her, and she was confident enough in her own ability to get in and out of the school without detection. With an impatient gesture she flung her evening wrap over the costume. Then she stepped towards the door.

Babs watched. Unknown and unsuspected by Babs, a pair of other eyes were watching. They were the eyes of the gipsy girl, Thalia Pascoe.

The door closed behind Lydia.

Babs waited, her mind running over the details of her own plan. Ten minutes later, when she guessed Lydia had got clear away, she rose and roused Bessie. Bessie was asleep—trust Bessie not to keep awake for any



thing once her plump head had touched the pillow—and came out of a dream with a breathless gasp. Babs pressed a hand over her mouth.

"Shush, chump! It's only Babs! Get up!"

"Eh? But 'tisn't rising-bell!" Bessie objected; then, as her slowly awakening brain grasped the situation, she blinked. "Oh, yes, of course!" she mumbled. "I sus-say, Babs, can't we put it off till to-morrow night?"

"Come on!" Babs said. With a sigh, Bessie rose. In a few minutes they had donned dressing-gowns and slippers, and Babs, holding Bessie's plump arm, led her to the Sixth Form corridor. Here the light still burned.

"Now," Babs whispered, "do your best, Bess. The big idea is to kid Rona out of her room in her dressing-gown." She opened the door of the empty study on the opposite side of the corridor to

room. Babs peered through the chink of the door opposite. Now Rona's door opened and Rona, holding her dressing-gown about her, appeared, to stare in amazement along the empty corridor.

Babs thrilled as she saw that dressing-gown—a thing of shimmering blue silk ornamented with white flowers.

"I sus-say, Babs, it's the one!"

Bessie stammered excitedly. "Hush!" Babs hissed. "Shush—oh my hat!"

For Bessie's whisper, low as it was, had reached the quick ears of Rona. They had forgotten for a moment that Rona had the sharpest ears in the school.

In a moment Rona was striding towards the door. Her face full of suspicion, she flung it open and switched on the light. Her amber eyes seemed to glow as they fastened upon the two juniors. Bessie smiled feebly.

"Oh, hallo, R-Rona! Fuf-fancy meeting you, you know!"

"Perhaps," Rona retorted, "I didn't!" Her eyes met and held Barbara's in a sort of challenge. "As a matter of fact, I missed this sash yesterday afternoon," she said. "I can only assume that some other girl found it, and has been wearing it. Not an impossible thing to happen, is it?"

Babs stared at her. She knew Rona was bluffing, but her story was plausible enough to convince anyone else.

"And you can't tell me," Rona said, "that you and Bessie are tricking me out of my bed in the middle of the night just in order to return this to me. In any case, you are breaking rules by being out of bed, and just to remind you of the fact you will each do a hundred lines. Apart from that," Rona went on, "you will do a further fifty lines for playing a joke on a prefect. Now get back to your beds."

"Oh, I sus-say—" Bessie stammered. Babs looked at her helplessly. Rona, as usual, had the whip-hand. True she



THE Fourth Formers watched admiringly as Thalia delicately balanced on the bed-rail. What an athlete the girl was! Nobody had eyes for Lydia Crossendale, as, scowling spitefully, that girl poised, a piece of soap in her hand.

Rona's. "I'll knock at the door and slip back, and then you start to ventriloquise in Miss Primrose's voice."

"Easy!" grinned Bessie, who really was amazingly clever at ventriloquism.

She slipped into the empty study. Babs, her heart thudding a little, tiptoed to Rona's door. Quickly she knocked, and in the act of slipping back heard Rona's surprised "Come in!" from inside the room. She nodded at Bessie.

"Well, come in!" Rona cried impatiently.

"Hem! Rona, I—I would prefer to see you here," came the voice of Miss Primrose—and Rona must have been very startled to hear it, because Rona, like the rest of the school, was under the impression that Miss Primrose was miles away. "Please, Rona, it is important."

"Right, Bess, that'll do," Babs breathed. "You've earned the cake! Now watch!"

A movement from inside Rona's

"So it was you!" Rona said. "You were ventriloquising, Bessie?"

"Me—ventriloquising," Bessie said, in wide-eyed innocence. "What's that?"

"Don't be a fool!" Rona rapped angrily. "Barbara, what's the game?"

Babs gulped. Well, she was in for it now, and they were caught. She decided to put a bold face on it.

"There's no game," she said. "Not at all. You see, we rather thought you might like to have this back." And, plunging her hand into the pocket of her own dressing-gown, she produced the sash. "Because it is yours, isn't it, Rona?" she added sweetly. "It was left behind in the Fourth Form dormitory after the Fifth's raid."

Just for an instant Rona's eyes flickered. Then calmly she took the sash and examined it.

"Why, yes," she confessed, "this is mine. But what a funny place to find it!"

"Perhaps," Babs ventured, "you left it there?"

had discovered what she had set out to discover, but where, after all, had that led her?

Forlornly the two Fourth Formers stepped into the corridor, and, spurred on by Rona's sour grin, started back towards the stairs. But as they reached the bottom of those stairs they both jumped.

From the direction of Big Hall had sounded Miss Bullivant's horrified voice. "Thalia! Lydia! And, Lydia, what are you doing in that fancy dress costume?"

"Babs, I sus-say—" Bessie stammered.

Babs' heart bounded. Thalia—and Lydia!

"Bessie, go on. I'm going along to see what's happened."

She did not wait for Bessie's reply, but sprinted off at once. Now she heard Lydia's voice shrilly protesting. Thalia's voice quickly and passionately

# OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



*Week by week your friend PATRICIA writes to you. She tells you all her own news, about things to talk about and things to make—all in that cheery, chummy way so typical of her. No wonder all schoolgirls have taken PATRICIA to their hearts and wouldn't miss her weekly pages for anything.*

**H**ERE is your Patricia—home again, after a really lovely holiday at the sea and country combined.

I'm afraid I was very old-fashioned and thought to myself: "Well, it's good to be home again!" much as I enjoyed my holiday.

But perhaps that's one of the joys of holidays—to appreciate your home even more on your return. Do you think it is?

## ● So Brown

I hadn't realised till now how brown I am. You know how it is—while you're away in the blazing sunshine, and everyone around you is looking rather like a collection of gipsies, you just don't notice your sun-tan.

It's when you come home again, and look at yourself in your bed-room mirror, that you wonder: "Can that brown-as-a-penny person be me?"

## ● Sun-Bleached

My hair also seems to have gone considerably fairer, which just shows what the sun does.

That's very nice, of course, but I'm afraid it means that it is probably drier as well.

As I don't want it to go like a haystack I must remember to give it a good rub-in with oil to-morrow night before washing it the next day.

That's [something you young things might like to make a mental note of if you are hair-critical—as I hope you are!

I hope I shan't bore you with some domestic talk, but our carpets hadn't got the "moth in," after all. So the trick that the "vacuum-cleaner man" told us, of wiping them all over lightly with eau-de-Cologne, WAS a good one.

Now that it's proved itself you can pass it on to your mother—with my love.

## ● A Quaint Barometer

What do you think your foolish Patricia brought back with her from the sea?

Why, a huge piece of seaweed—to act as a weather-prophet. (I hope!)

I've placed it in a flower-pot, which I've painted green, and hung it on a nail in the back porch.

So now every time I go to the back door I feel the seaweed, and am trying to make a reputation for myself as a sort of human barometer.

"It's going to be fine," I say delightedly, when the seaweed is bone dry.

"It's going to rain," I say regretfully, when it feels rather damp.

What it will say when it's going to snow, or be foggy, I don't know.

I'll tell you round about Christmas-time—if it doesn't curl up and drop to pieces on the heads of our unsuspecting tradesmen by that time!

## ● A Diction Test

Talking about the weather, do you know that rhyme which goes:

"Whether the weather be cold,  
Or whether the weather be hot—  
We'll weather the weather, whatever the weather,  
Whether we like it or not!"

You read it over aloud to yourself; it's quite tricky to make the "whether" and the "weather" sound different, as they should, of course, if your elocution is up to standard.

And if you've got a friend coming to tea before very long, see if you can remember to give it to her as a sort of "dictation test."

Not exactly the way to treat a guest, perhaps, but I'm sure she won't mind—particularly if she gets all the "weathers" and "whethers" right!

I saw such a cute idea in a shop near us. It was a pencil with a light attached to it—for writing in the dark, if you please.

"Now what sort of people would want to write in the dark?" I thought to myself. And then it dawned on me—when I'd seen the name of the pencil, mind you.

It was called the A.R.P. pencil.

I think I must save up and buy one for my big brother Brian, who'll probably be one of the Militiamen next year.

## ● Fun at the Fair

Oh, I went to a fair the other day, with my small brother, whose full name is Heatherington—though don't ask me why!—(but who is called Heath for short) and a young schoolgirl who lives in our road, named Rosemary.

Rosemary blued at least sixpence trying to "hoop a watch"—though why I couldn't make out—since they were men's watches!

Anyhow, she didn't win anything, so we passed on.



I was the next one to take a risk—at the darts' board.

I'd once heard of a very good player who had aimed for the "bull" in darts at a fair. Three times he hit it, and three times his dart jumped out of the board. So this angry and suspicious young man leapt over the barrier and examined the dartboard.

And guess what? There was a nail right through the centre!

"They don't catch me like that," resolved your Patricia.

So I aimed at the 19. Generally I only get a 3 when I do this—but believe me, I got a "treble"—that was 57. Two more darts to go, so I threw fairly wildly. There was a double 11 and a 7—giving me a total of 86.

And you needed a score of 85 or over to win a prize.

So off went your Patricia in triumph with a paper parasol—more surprised than even the man who kept the darts stall.

And apparently my luck was in, too, for I then won two coconuts—and Rosemary one.

But I wasn't so lucky when I bought a luscious-looking toffee-apple—for the inside was quite bad.

Still I had my trophies to take home—even though I'm not very fond of coconut!

## ● A Friendship Record

I expect you made plenty of friends while you were away, didn't you? (And a good many of you are still away and still making them, for that matter.)

Those lucky girls who've been on a cruise, particularly, will certainly like to keep a "Friendship Record" of their holiday. The one in the picture above is made of several thick sheets of drawing paper cut to postcard size.

The cover could be a pretty postcard view of one of the places on the trip, or else an enlargement of a favourite snap. You place the postcard on top of the paper and then jab two holes through all thicknesses and thread bright raffia or coloured string through.

Inside, you can keep snaps, names and addresses—autographs—or any cuttings from leaflets.

It will make a fascinating little something-to-do while you are at home before going back to school again, and give you a record that you will love to look back on when holidays are just a memory.

Bye-bye now, pets, until next week!

Your friend,

PATRICIA.







# A HOLIDAY AT HOME

Some suggestions for making the most of those days between the seaside and the return to school.

delights of the countryside itself—if she will make inquiries.

Often the grounds of large houses are open to the public, free; there are ruins to be explored, monuments to puzzle over, and historical landmarks to thrill.

## ALL FREE

Museums generally sound rather stuffy, I know. But they can be a source of delight and wonder if you really make up your mind to be interested. And once you're interested—well, I'm afraid you'll never be bored again.

For most of them contain treasures to satisfy all tastes—stamps, coins, wild flowers, birds, lovely china, and historical relics.

The joy of them is, too, that generally they are free to enter.

(Perhaps if there were a fee to pay, it would make them seem more exciting!)

So this means that these pleasures will cost you nothing—unless, of course, there are bus and train fares to consider. But these are well worth while from your holiday pocket money, particularly if you take sandwiches with you—so that you have no expenses for "tuck."

## IN THE HOUSE

The stay-at-home girl will find lots to interest her in and around the house. She should make up her mind to do something fresh each day.

"Decorating" a room sounds pretty ambitious, I know. But you'd never believe how easy it is to distemper a room in a gay new colour, or to apply fresh paint to window-sills, and skirting boards.

This is not a cheap pastime, of course—but it would cost considerably less than if done by qualified decorators. And father would give you all necessary hints, I'm sure.

Turning out wardrobes and tidying chests of drawers doesn't sound very glamorous—but it can be engrossing, and so satisfying in its results.

Or perhaps you'd like to make a fire-screen to cover up your bed-room grate.

A very snappy one can be made from a sixpenny clothes-horse, a piece of cretonne, and some drawing-pins.

You place the material—keeping it straight and smooth—over the "horse," and fix it in position with drawing-pins. That's all!

But what a difference it would make to the appearance of your room.

## IN THE GARDEN

Or you may like to get into the garden.

So what about giving father's gardening tools a treat—and father himself a grand surprise?

Clean all the mud off with a stick, or trowel, and then rub them over with an oily rag.

Do the deck-chairs require a patch-up? It's quite simple to apply new "seating accommodation," you know—for the canvas can be bought all ready.

Perhaps the family car could do with a super-clean and polish, and I'm quite certain the bikes would love a good oiling and touching-up.

So, altogether, you see, there's tons to do

So much, in fact, that you'll be positively astounded at how quickly school-time will come round again!



**D**O you ever get a sort of in-betweeny feeling when you've come home from your holiday, and it isn't quite time to start school again?

I know a good many schoolgirls do, and are often wondering what to do next.

Well, here are some suggestions that may appeal to you—according to whether you are the outdoor girl, fond of exploring or the stay-at-home type.

The outdoor girl should certainly consider some long hikes. For these a friend is nice, I admit, but if yours are all away, or not available, then the next best thing is a dog. (Some people insist they are even better than a human companion—but that's not the point!)

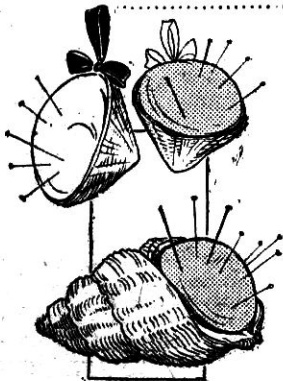
If you haven't a pet of your own, I'm quite sure some of your neighbours have—and would their hounds love a jaunt with you?

You should trot along to your nearest public library and find out something about the places of interest around your home. It's surprising the number of people who live simply surrounded by all sorts of exciting things—yet don't know it!

## AROUND AND ABOUT

I don't have to remind London girls of the sights and discoveries there are to be made in our city, nor of the miles of "country" walks there are to be found in parks and heaths right in the town.

But the country girl also, can find heaps of historically interesting places near her home—quite apart from the



**M**OST of us like to bring back some little trophies from the beach after our holiday, don't we?

But it isn't always that we know just what to do with our "treasures"—especially shells.

So here are some suggestions. They would make really pretty pincushions, either for yourself or to give away as small presents.

# FRESH FROM THE SEA

Would you like to make these novelties from the shells you've brought back home from your holiday?

## FOR PINS AND NEEDLES

First you should scrub the shells and dry them thoroughly. Then gather round the edge of a little circle of velvet or velveteen and pull up the cotton, leaving long ends to be snipped off later.

Fill the inside of the shell with bran or sawdust and then tuck in the velvet cover. Glue this to the inside of the shell, and the pincushion is complete—unless you like to bore a hole in the shell and thread ribbon through, so that it can be hung up.

## A COLOURFUL GARDEN

A seaside garden is another idea you might like to carry out. You will want an old soup plate. Then on this you arrange sand, pebbles, and little shells.

A big shell in the middle looks rather like a cave or a pagoda, and the Eastern-looking archway is made of dead matchsticks tied together.

A piece of mirror in the centre would make a convincing looking lake, and you can even plant tiny cactus or rock plants among the sand to add a touch of "greenery" to your seaside garden.



(Continued from page 11)

speaking. She reached the scene, to find Miss Bullivant there, and in front of her Lydia and Thalia. Thalia's face was darkly sulky; Lydia's white with terror and anger.

"Thalia!" Babs cried.  
"Barbara, don't interfere!" Miss Bullivant rapped. "Lydia, apparently, has been out—and not only out, but to a fancy-dress dance. Thalia here intercepted her, and prevented her from coming in."

"Thalia!" Babs started. "Thalia, why—"  
"She wanted to get even with me!" Lydia flamed out. "Sneaking and spying this afternoon, she found out I was going to the dance to-night. When I tried to get in at the lobby window she wouldn't let me, and created a fine old shindy to bring Miss Bullivant on the scene."

Thalia regarded her with smouldering eyes.

"I also am to be reported, am I not? And still you refuse to say what you have done with my locket? If you had told me—"

"Girls, please!" Miss Bullivant broke in. "Silence, both of you! You will rouse the whole school—indeed, I perceive you have already aroused Barbara. Barbara, take both these girls back to the dormitory, and to-morrow both of them will report to me. Lydia, this will probably mean expulsion!"

"Oh, my hat! Come on!" Babs muttered. "Lydia—"

Lydia was almost sobbing now—sobbing with temper and with fright. Thalia, seeing the look which Babs gave her, turned away, and of her own accord whisked hastily towards the stairs.

"Expelled!" Lydia muttered. "Expelled through that cat! Babs—"

"But, Lydia, it was your own fault," Babs began.

"It wasn't my fault!" Lydia passionately denied. "If it hadn't been for that cat I should have been in bed by now. She planned this! Sneaking and spying this afternoon, she got wind I was off on this jaunt, and then refused to let me come in until I gave her her beastly locket. And now—expelled!" she panted. "And that, Barbara Redfern, is the girl you've chosen for a pal!"

Babs was silent; shaken herself. Earned though Lydia's punishment was, it was impossible not to feel pity for her.

"But, Lydia, do you know anything about that locket?" she asked.

Lydia faced her.

"Honestly, Barbara, I know no more than you do," she said, "and if you doubt me you can search everything I've got. But not," she added, "that that makes any difference now. The mischief is done."

Done the mischief was, but it was done in more than one direction. Lydia, boiling with fury and terror, was in no mood to be merciful or lenient with Thalia, and within five minutes of entering the dormitory the whole of the Form knew what had happened. Thalia had done something more than sneaking; Thalia had got Lydia threatened with expulsion.

As one the Fourth turned on Thalia. For once even Babs could find no word in her defence. Whatever her motive, however strong her own sense of loss, Thalia had acted inexorably.

And Thalia, because of that, must suffer.

Thalia did suffer.  
In the morning nobody spoke to her. All sympathy was for Lydia. Only one

word was directed at Thalia before breakfast, and that came from Freda Ferriers.

"Traitor!" Freda hissed.  
Thalia winced as if she had been struck.

She silently finished her dressing and walked out. More slowly Babs followed her, and reaching Study No. 4, found Thalia there waiting to meet her. Her face was quivering.

"Barbara, you—you do not hate me? This morning you have not spoken to me. What is the matter with everyone—they are so cold?"

"Thalia, don't you understand that Lydia is to be expelled?" Babs asked wearily. "And don't you understand that it's the worst thing that could have happened to a girl? And don't you understand," she added, "that it is your fault she is to be expelled?"

Thalia quivered.  
"If she had given me my locket—" she persisted.

"Thalia," Babs said definitely, "she has not got your locket. I am certain of that. You acted wrongly. Not only have you got Lydia expelled, but you have got yourself reported all over again and put the whole Form dead against you. All along I've tried to keep you in check, but you've let your temper run away with you."

"I'm sorry, Thalia"—and Babs really did feel angry now, though she hated to see the expression that came into the other's eyes—"but—but you are rather straining friendship—here, I say, where are you going?" she cried in alarm.

For Thalia, suddenly putting both hands to her face, had rushed out of the room.

### Babs' Big Bluff!



SHE had done wrong. And Babs, that girl whose friendship, she now realised, she valued more than anything else on earth—yes, even above her treasured locket—despised her!

So Thalia told herself as, rushing

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blindly into the cloisters she sobbed her heart out on the stone seat there.

At last Thalia quietened.

Was it too late to redeem herself in Babs' eyes, in Lydia's eyes, to put herself right with the rest of the school?

Gone for the moment was all thought of her locket. Gone now her hatred of Lydia. Only earnestness of purpose and an almost frantic anxiety to do the right thing before everything else was irretrievably lost swayed her.

She'd show Babs. She'd show the Fourth and Lydia that she was not all the bad girl they thought her.

Inspired by that resolve, she felt happier somehow. On the lookout now for good turns, she went quickly back to Study No. 4. Babs was not there, being engaged on her Form captain's duties, and neither was Mabs nor Bessie, but on Babs' desk were the unfinished lines that Miss Bullivant had given her yesterday.

With sudden inspiration, Thalia sat down and finished them off. Just before lesson bell went they were done. She rose with a little sigh of joy. Off she trotted and put them on Miss Bullivant's desk. Dear Babs! She'd be pleased when she found out.

But Babs, as it happened, wasn't. For it was not from Thalia but from Miss Bullivant, who took the first period of lessons, she discovered Thalia's good turn. Miss Bullivant was rather flinty-eyed as she thrust the lines back at her in the class-room.

"Barbara, how you hoped to deceive me into believing these were your lines passes my comprehension," Miss Bullivant said tartly. "It is plain to see that you have given them to some other girl to do. Take them back and consider the imposition doubled."

"Oh!" gasped Thalia, with a quick catch of the breath.

Babs blinked, not understanding at first. But when she recognised the handwriting she looked in dismay at Thalia, and Thalia, miserable again because she had got Babs into fresh trouble, hung her head.

Still, Thalia was not beaten yet. She hoped, even if she was making mistakes, that her mistakes would be forgiven. Not, indeed, that the Fourth was interested in Thalia's endeavours. They all despised her, and had as good as sent her to Coventry.

Mid-morning break came. Thalia knew that Miss Charmant would be taking next lesson, and wandering off on her own, racked her brain to think of some way in which she could gain Miss Charmant's good graces.

Then her eyes shone as, passing Miss Bullivant's study, she saw a bunch of flowers on the window-sill.

Thalia beamed. It did not occur to her even to question where those flowers came from. In her wild gipsy life flowers had always been hers for the picking—they were one with the air, the rain, the wind and grass.

But she remembered that Miss Charmant liked flowers, and gleefully grabbing hold of this bunch, rushed them off at once to the class-room and sat in thrilled, expectant happiness until Miss Charmant and the rest of the class came in, and fairly hugged herself when she saw Miss Charmant's face light up.

The mistress looked over the class. She was going to ask where the flowers came from, but before she could get the words out of her mouth, Miss Bullivant entered. She looked at the flowers, and gave a most surprised start.

"Why, goodness gracious, those are my flowers!" she cried. "I left them on my window-sill while I went to



fetch a vase. Miss Charmant, how did they come here?"

"I'm sure, Miss Bullivant, I don't know," Miss Charmant said, frowning. "Which girl put the flowers here?"

Thalia stood up.

"Please, Miss Charmant, I did," she said. "I—I thought you'd like them, you see."

"You mean," the scandalised Miss Bullivant cried, "you stole those flowers from my window to give to Miss Charmant?"

Thalia looked utterly dismayed.

"Well, I—only wanted to do Miss Charmant a good turn," she faltered.

There was a titter in the class. But Babs frowned.

"I see!" Miss Bullivant's lips compressed. "And in order to do one mistress a good turn, you do another a bad one? I suppose," she added, "you hoped Miss Charmant would relent and excuse your bad behaviour? I am sorry, Thalia. If this is an attempt to reform, it has come too late. Your record is far, far too bad to be so easily wiped out, as Miss Primrose will probably agree when she returns this afternoon."

"This afternoon!" Babs couldn't help exclaiming, while Thalia turned deathly pale.

"This afternoon," Miss Bullivant affirmed. "Now, Thalia, please sit down."

And Thalia, with a dazed look which went straight to Babs' heart, mutely sat down.

**"BUT, BABS!"** Thalia cried, "what am I to do? If Miss Primrose sends me away what hope have I? Yes, I know I can go back to the gipsies, but what is my future with them?"

Her face was wild and desperate. And Babs, whose heart had been touched by Thalia's evident sincerity to show another side to her nature, felt the old instinctive liking, bubbling within her.

"But, Thalia, you did wrong."

"I know," Thalia hung her head.

"But it is a wrong I should never have done, Babs, if somebody had not taken my locket. Yet even that does not seem to matter now," she added. "Oh, Babs, what can I do?" she piteously burst out.

"Thalia—" Babs muttered, and, affected herself, went to her and put a hand upon her shaking shoulders. "Thalia, please! Don't—don't upset yourself. We—we'll make it all come right—somehow, I promise. I'll do—something!"

She went out then. A brave promise she had made, but a rash promise. What could she do? Only one little glimmer of hope had Babs.

She still believed that Rona Fox, in spite of her glib wriggling, had taken Thalia's locket. If that could be proved and brought home to her it would establish one thing at least—that Rona had deliberately persecuted Thalia, and in recognition of that circumstance Miss Primrose might regard Thalia's shortcomings more tolerantly. But how to prove it?

And why, if Rona had that locket, had she stolen it?

The one link between Rona and her mischief-making was Lydia, and to Lydia, Babs went. She found that girl very down in the mouth and looking forward with trembling terror to the return of Miss Primrose. She was in no mood at all to be spiteful, she was only sorry for herself.

"I've got an idea," Babs said, "that if I can help Thalia I might also help you Lydia. But I want you to be frank with me. I don't believe you've

got that locket, but I do believe there's been some sort of understanding between you and Rona. Why did Rona let you off all your punishments?"

"Just," Lydia said bitterly, "because I was baiting that rotten gipsy girl. She didn't like her any more than I did. For no other reason as far as I know."

Babs nodded. She was satisfied with that. But why should Rona want to goad the gipsy girl—and encourage Lydia into goading her? Simply because, Babs thought shrewdly, goading Thalia meant that Thalia would lose her temper, and in consequence of losing her temper get herself bad reports, with the result that she gained none of the favour she desired in Miss Primrose's eyes. Perhaps, Babs thought, it was Rona's plot to get Thalia thrown out of Cliff House.

Why?

Again Babs did not know, nor was

suddenly, just before dismissal, she got her idea—a desperate idea in truth, a colossal piece of bluff.

When dismissal came, she grabbed hold of Mabel Lynn.

"Mabs, you've got to help me," she said quickly. "For Thalia's sake! I want to find out if Rona's got her locket. The idea is to bluff Rona into believing that we've found the locket. You see?"

Mabs didn't, but she had faith enough in Babs to do as she was asked. She went off, while Babs, racing up to her dormitory, grabbed her gold fob and the chain attached to it, and then, rushing out again, saw Rona coming along the Fourth Form corridor in front of Clara Trevely, Janet Jordan, and Leila Carroll, who had just emerged from the Common-room. With part of the chain showing in one fist, she shouted to them.

"Clara—Janet—Leila, come and



**BABS** allowed a little of the gold chain to show. "Look at this, girls," she cried. "I've found Thalia's locket!" In the background Rona Fox started. She had overheard—just as Babs had intended she should.

there time to worry about that then. The thing was to get the locket from Rona. But dinner came and she had thought of nothing. Lessons came, and still she had not seen a way out.

All through lessons Thalia sat, white-faced, wretched, her eyes on the window, dreading to see Miss Primrose's car coming up the drive.

At last, half an hour before dismissal, it did come.

"Babs—Babs, she's here!" Thalia choked. "Oh, Babs, what shall I do?"

Babs clenched her hands. She must do something—must, must, must! Ten minutes later Miss Charmant came in. She had a word with Miss Bullivant, who was in charge, and then looked at Thalia.

"Thalia, Miss Primrose wishes to see you."

With tottering steps Thalia left the room, her last longing, despairing glance all for Babs. Never in her life had Babs seen so stricken a look on any girl's face.

Minutes passed—five, ten, fifteen. Babs sat biting her lip. And then

look at this. I've found Thalia's locket!"

She saw Rona give a start.

"What?" cried Clara.

"Yes, come and look!" laughed Babs. "I say, it's wonderful, isn't it? I found it—oh, you'd never guess where! Hallo, Rona," she added, as the prefect, her face suddenly twitching, stood before her.

And Babs allowed a little of the gold chain to slip through her fingers.

"Where did you get it?" Rona asked almost hoarsely.

"Just where," Babs cooed, "it had been hidden, you know. Quite a cunning spot, wasn't it, Rona?"

Clara & Co., not quite understanding, stared, and their eyes widened as Rona, in sudden agitated fury, swept away.

"Babs, what's the game?" demanded Clara.

"The game," Babs said, "is that Rona fancies I've stolen that locket from her. Come on, everybody! I think we're going to save Thalia yet."

And she followed on the prefect's heels.

## 16 "Only Babs Could Control Her!"

MABEL LYNN, hidden behind the screen in Rona Fox's study, held her breath as the door came open and Rona stepped into the room.

"It can't be it—it can't be!" Rona muttered agitatedly. "Those little cats—those spying little cats!"

She crossed to the wall. Above the fireplace hung a small miniature painting on ivory.

She grabbed it down, and Mabs watching round the edge of the screen, stared as she pulled open the back of the miniature and toppled something out on to her hand.

"Bluff!" cried Rona. "They didn't find it! It was just a plot to scare me, and I, like a frightened fool, fell for it! I—" And then she wheeled round—too late. "Mabel Lynn!"

For Mabs, throwing the screen aside, had jumped. And before astonished and startled Rona realised what had happened, Mabs had snatched the locket from her hand, was making back towards the door.

"Mabel, come back!" Rona shrieked.

Out of the room and down the passage Mabs flew, just as Babs & Co. appeared at the end of it. Babs saw the locket which dangled from her hand. She saw Rona.

"Mabs—quickly! Head's study," she cried. "Clara, Janet, Leila—keep Rona away!"

She caught Mabs' hand. While Clara & Co. stood barring Rona's way, she whisked her off. Her heart was leaping then. Her last minute ruse had succeeded.

Would they save Thalia at last?

Into the Head's study Babs and Mabs pelted, to be greeted by a surprised and angry cry from Miss Primrose. Miss Primrose was at her desk, and in front of it, her face white, her eyes full of misery, was Thalia. And with Thalia was Miss Charmant and a strange man Babs had never seen before.

Gasping, Babs dropped the locket on Miss Primrose's desk, and at sight of it Thalia gave a jump.

"Babs, my locket! Where did you get it?"

"From the girl who stole it from you in the first place!" Babs cried. "Rona Fox, the girl who's been making things difficult for Thalia all along!"

"Rona!" It was the strange man who spoke. He had also jumped to his feet. With eyes full of wonder he was staring at the locket. "Rona is my niece," he said. "Rona is practically my adopted daughter. But this—this—Miss Primrose, let me look at that!" he cried, with sudden agitation, glancing strangely at Thalia. He took the locket and snapped it open. "It—it's the same!" he cried hoarsely. "The same! My wife's locket!"

"Er! Hem!" Miss Primrose said flusteredly. "Mr. Fox—"

Mr. George Fox passed a trembling hand across his forehead.

"Miss Primrose, forgive me!" he said. "I had no idea when I called in that a thing of such staggering magnitude could happen. But this—this locket belonged to my little daughter, whom I have given up as lost these last twelve years. She disappeared during a thunderstorm in the Forest of Dean, when we were caravanning on holiday, and—and she had this with her." Again he looked at Thalia, and now there was something in his face which vaguely awed Babs. "And you—you had it?" he cried. "You— My goodness, now I begin to see the likeness to your mother! Tell me, Thalia, have you a birthmark—a butterfly—on your left shoulder?"

"Yes," Babs cried excitedly.

"Thalia show it—look!"

And she pulled aside the bewildered girl's collar. The butterfly mark was revealed. Mr. Fox drew a deep breath.

"My little girl!" he breathed. "Thalia, look at me! Don't you realise—I am your father!"

From Thalia came a low, quivering cry.

Miss Primrose sank back, shaking her head bemusedly. Babs beamed at Mabs. Now she saw the plot, now she guessed everything!

Rona, seeing that locket, hearing the story of the locket, had guessed who Thalia was from the first, and Rona, who must have known that her uncle was due for an early visit, had been in mortal terror lest he should, by accident, see the locket on Thalia when he came. In that case, of course, Rona would have had to take a back place in her uncle's affections.

And so Rona, not Lydia, had stolen and hidden the locket, and Rona, scared of the presence of Thalia, had tried to goad her into getting herself thrown out of the school.

Clear as crystal, the whole thing became then.

That reunion between father and daughter was interrupted, however, by the arrival of furious-faced Rona. Into the study she stormed, only to turn deathly white when she saw her uncle.

He faced her sternly.

"Rona," he said, "I think I begin to understand what has happened. You stole this locket! Meanwhile, I think we ought all to be grateful to this girl, Barbara and her friends for the magnificent way they have helped Thalia and brought all this unhappy business to a very marvellous end. Thalia, my dear, you will come home with me afterwards."

"And—and I'm forgiven?" Thalia asked falteringly.

"Things were made awfully difficult for her, Miss Primrose," Babs put in.

Miss Primrose gazed at Rona for a moment.

"Of course, my dear," Miss Primrose murmured kindly. "I am sorry your experience at this school has not been happier, but if there is anything I can do for you by way of recompense—"

Thalia smiled.

"It—it was my fault that Lydia got into that bother, and as I am to leave the school I should hate to leave feeling that I have hurt another girl,

and—and if you could forgive Lydia I—"

Miss Primrose hesitated.

"Well, perhaps—well, in the circumstances, yes!" she said. "Very well, Thalia, I will not expel Lydia, and you may as well tell her so yourself. Meantime, my dear, let me wish you every happiness and success in your new life, and also," she added, looking gratefully at Babs, "allow me to extend my thanks and admiration to you, Barbara. Now, as Mr. Fox wishes to talk to Rona, you may all go."

And they went, taking Thalia with them. They went first to Lydia, lifting that girl from the utmost depths of despair into sudden raptures of happiness. Then they whirled off to the tuckshop, there to make merry and spread the great story and to invite everybody within reach to come and celebrate the wonderful occasion and to congratulate the gipsy girl of Cliff House. But in the Head's study Mr. Fox, grim and stern, was alone with Rona.

"I think I know exactly why you acted as you did," he said coldly "and I'm bitterly ashamed and disappointed in you. You would have kept me from my daughter because of your selfish ends."

Rona hung her head.

"And for that," Mr. Fox said contemptuously, "I completely disown and disinherit you. And I hope," he added, "it will be a lesson to you never to let your spite have its sway again. Good-bye!"

He took up his hat. He went out, leaving Rona standing like a statue—until she heard a great roar of cheering from the quad, and, looking through the window, saw Babs, Thalia, and a crowd of other cheering girls surrounding Mr. Fox, to drag him off in triumph to the tuckshop.

Then all at once an amber flame lit up her eyes. Fiercely her hands clenched.

"Thalia takes my place, does she?" she muttered. "And for all of it I have Barbara Redfern to thank!" She quivered a little, but her face was fierce and hard. "Very well, Barbara Redfern! Very well! I will make you sorry for this day's work. My chance will come! Just wait!"

And as another happy burst of cheering reached her ears she whirled from the study.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

## COMPLETE NEXT WEEK

THRILLS, EXCITEMENT, and  
BAFFLING MYSTERY for  
BARBARA REDFERN & Co.

with—



When Berry Osborne, one-time scholar at Cliff House, and now a racing car driver, came to compete in a big race near the school, Babs & Co. were delighted. Berry was a sport, still a madcap at heart, full of schoolgirlish spirits. They knew they'd have a grand time with her. And so they did—but with the most dramatic complications when it was realised that Berry had a secret enemy bent on ruining her chances in the race. Be sure to read this magnificent Hilda Richards story.



COMPLETE this week. Another fascinating Canadian story featuring—

# KIT OF RED RANCH



The old hermit was short of food, and alone—alone with sad memories of the past. Kit, hearing his story when she took him food, resolved to try to help him, never dreaming of the astounding consequences.

"If we make it," said Kit, "it'll be the last time I'll take food to the hermit. He'll have to stop being a hermit!"

In the canoe was a hamper that they were taking to the old man who spent his life in the catacombs on the far side of the canyon. The bridge, that was his only means of access to the mainland, had been swept away in a gale, and he was stranded without food.

Kit had not hesitated to answer the call for help which he had sent pinned to an arrow shaft, but the thought came to her now that to have waited until the river had calmed would have shown more wisdom.

Twenty yards to go, and the canoe was shooting along at hissing speed.

Kit set her lips, and with eyes alert for rocks, ready to turn the nose of the canoe if they headed for one, she knelt with every muscle tense.

A moment later they were in water that seemed to heave as though it boiled. It roared and thundered, hissed and frothed. The canoe leaped and jumped. For one awful moment it seemed to heel over.

It seemed incredible to Kit that a moment later they had jumped down to calm water, and were still on an even keel! But they were safe and sound.

"Gee, it's over!" she breathed. "Bad, bad—much water," nodded Redwing. "Safe now."

At easy speed they paddled on to the landing point, where Kit, cupping her hands, called up.

"Ahoy, there! Hermit—food!" On the rocks above she suddenly saw a bearded man. His beard was white and patriarchal, and even though his face could not be clearly seen its outline suggested dignity.

"Hallo!" he called, in gentle, quavering tones.

"We have brought food," said Kit. "Shall we bring it up?"

"Thank you!" he replied. Kit gave Redwing a nod and they stepped out of the canoe, the Redskin

girl carrying the hamper. It was not easy to climb the path, but though he came down to meet them, they were so much more sure-footed than he that they met him two-thirds of the way.

Kit, halting, studied him with great interest. He was a handsome old man, his whole appearance spruce, and utterly different from what she had expected. His white shirt, although faded, looked as though it had been just recently washed, and his hands were soft and refined.

"You should not have undertaken so great a risk," he said. "It's mighty kind and brave of you to come and help an old man."

He made to take the hamper, but Kit shook her head.

"That's all right, granddad," she said. "We'll bring it up the rest of the way."

Kit had a persuasive, rather dominating manner, and the hermit, although reluctant to let them climb farther, finally turned and went ahead.

"A pretty lonely home you've got," said Kit, dumping the hamper when they reached the top of the climb.

"Lonely, maybe, but this has been my home for twenty years or more, and it'll be that till my reckoning's run."

"Without the bridge?" Kit asked. The hermit nodded.

"Without the bridge it will be hard; but the bridge will be repaired. I cannot leave my home. To you it may seem strange that I want to be alone, but then, you do not know my story."

He took up the hamper with an ease which revealed that although he seemed old and frail, he was still quite strong. Having done so, he took a small roll of notes from his pocket, and, in a most embarrassed manner, asked Kit what he owed her for the hamper.

"I still have money left, and I'd like to pay for what you so kindly brought," he explained. "And for any other expense you were put to."

"Just a minute!" said Kit, taking his arm. "Let's get this talked over. The bridge won't be repaired for weeks. I've managed to bring the food this time, but I can't promise to do it again. And the cowboys won't. You can take it from me they'll bring you over to our side of the crevasse rather than that."

The hermit eyed her—first with perplexity, and then alarm.

"You mean they will try to take me from here?" he exclaimed.

"Fraid so," Kit said gently. "But what's the attraction about these caves that keeps you here?"

"Painful memories," he murmured. "I—I— My son—my only son—went into the catacombs and never returned. That is why I am here; that is why I shall always be here. Now that my son has been taken from me I have no wish to go out into the world."

## The Hermit's Secret!

"GEE, Redwing, it looks like we've bitten off more'n we can chew this time!"

Kit Hartley, of Red Ranch, spoke in tense tones, and her face was pale under the sun-tan that the open-air life on the Canadian plains had given her.

There was every reason for her concern. She and her Redskin friend were handling a canoe that was speeding towards roaring rapids only fifty yards ahead. The roar was deafening and the speed of the water much greater than Kit had bargained for when she set out on this journey.

But there was no drawing back now. They could not stop the canoe. They had all their work cut out to prevent it running out of control.

"Not paddle more," said Redwing softly.

Kit eased her paddle. She sat in the fore part of the canoe and Redwing behind, for the Redskin girl was an expert, and Kit had left the steering to her.

On either side of them were the steep, rocky cliffs of the large canyon. If they were flung into the water they stood a chance of being crushed against the rocks, or stunned and drowned.

If they did manage to shoot those rushing rapids, then their mission would be as good as over, for there was smooth water ahead all the way to the landing-place.

By

Elizabeth Chester

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Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

## BETWEEN OURSELVES



**M**Y DEAR READERS.—This week I want to ask your help.

I have told you before how helpful your letters can be in aiding me to have stories written which are generally popular. For instance, when I hear from a vast number of you that a story starring, say, Diana Royston-Clarke against Babs, pleased you immensely, I know that those two characters in conflict is a "winner."

This information is passed on to Miss Hilda Richards. She makes a note of it, and some time in the future another story starring these popular Cliff House girls appears.

This applies equally to other characters, of course.

In fact, girls, if it wasn't for your friendly and extremely helpful letters, I should probably find myself a little doubtful as to the exact type of story to give you. So let me say a little "thank you" here and now.

But beyond just the characters we have different backgrounds to stories. For instance, since the beginning of this year we have featured ice-skating, table tennis, amateur dramatics, dogs (pet stories), domestic activities (when Babs & Co. became cooks at Cliff House), horse riding, treasure-hunting, motor-car racing. Very varied, eh, girls? Have you any

great favourites amongst them? If you have, that is where you can once again be of assistance to your Editor—by mentioning your preference next time you write to Miss Hilda Richards or myself. Will you? Thanks so much.

Now here is a treat for those of you who like to read about motor-racing. Next week's Long Complete Cliff House story, entitled:

**"THEIR CHUM, THE MADCAP SPEED-GIRL"**

features that exciting sport.

The madcap speed-girl is a one-time scholar of Cliff House named Berry Osborne—and how you will like her! Berry left the school some years before and is now a young woman, and a dashing racing driver. But at heart she is still the same old cheery madcap, always ready for fun.

You can imagine how delighted Babs & Co. are to be with her. The thrills they have with her on the racing track—the excitement in school!

And there is more to it than that. Another old girl plays her part in this story—to say nothing of a mysterious girl speedster, who seems to be aiming blows at Berry.

Is Berry worried? Not a bit. So Babs & Co. decide that it is up to them to protect their delightful friend.

It's a grand story, girls. I know you'll enjoy it.

Valerie Drew will be with you again next week, of course. She is certainly up against a very intriguing mystery, and a very intriguing character, too, in Johnny Jevons. Then there is "Kit of Red Ranch" and Patricia saying "Hallo" once again, with two delightful pages of "something to interest and amuse all schoolgirls." And, to complete another issue of THE SCHOOLGIRL, a few words from

Your very sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Kit gave back the photograph, but her heart was thumping fast. For of a sudden she had seen that same face older, much older, with a cowboy hat surmounting it; the same smile, the same crinkles.

If Kit had had a million pounds she would have staked it all that the face of the cowboy she could see in her mind's eye and the one shown in the photograph were the same—the same, making an allowance for the difference of age.

She would have staked a million that that photograph was of Ken Dallas at the age of nine years. And Ken Dallas was a cowboy signed on only the week before at her father's ranch!

### Kit Learns Everything!

**A** STRANGE excitement filled Kit, so that it was all she could do not to tell the hermit what she thought, but her common sense was strong enough to rule her impulses.

No good could come of raising this old man's hopes that his son lived. She must investigate first.

So she said nothing more about it as she wished him good luck and promised to look him up again within the week.

"Do not fear for me, dear, kind friend," he said, clasping her hand. "The bridge will be built again, and life will go on as before for me. Your kindness in bringing the food I'll never forget."

Kit looked back as she and Redwing reached the canoe. He stood at the top of the precipice waving, and was still there when their canoe had turned the bend in the canyon.

"Poor old fellow!" said Kit sadly. "He can't stay there—and he mustn't! For his own sake we've got to be firm, Redwing."

Then she broached the thought that had been uppermost in her mind ever since she had entered the catacombs.

"Redwing, are you quite sure that there is a way out of those awful caves?"

Redwing nodded her sleek, black-haired head.

"Yes, Miss Kit," she said earnestly, "way through. Redwing not been, but heard tell. Long, long tunnel with water. Long miles—other side hill."

"Um!" mused Kit. "But if the boy had found it—waal, I reckon he'd have found some way back to his pa. Someone would have found him. But suppose he didn't! Suppose—"

Suppose, ran her thoughts, that in some strange way he had not found his way back, but had been captured by bandits, or Indians—

Even if that had happened, it was just incredible that Ken Dallas could be the missing boy! And yet—the more Kit thought of it, the greater the resemblance between the two seemed.

When they reached the rapids, they ran the canoe to the rocks at the side, left it there, and on foot picked their way to a point where the water had not gained high speed. They had left another canoe moored at that point, ready for their homeward journey.

Although getting the other canoe over the rapids was beyond them, the Indians from whom they had borrowed them would know how to do it; and Kit and Redwing returned to the Indian camp to explain where they had left it.

Half an hour later they were back at Red Ranch.

Kit's dad was awaiting her. He had just heard of her exploit, and he was frowning in disapproval.

Kit eyed him with deep sympathy and pity as he told them the whole tragic story. The hermit was a professor who had visited the caves to examine them scientifically. His son, then a boy of nine, had daringly gone into the catacombs to explore them. He had never been seen again.

The tragedy had happened many years ago—a full twenty—but from that day the hermit's interest in the outer world had been lost.

Kit's sympathy touched him; and when she asked if she might see his home he hesitated only a moment before agreeing.

Never having explored the catacombs, Kit approached them—and it was with a sense of awe. They burrowed into the mighty hill—a network of caves and corridors, one leading into another endlessly.

The hermit's home was an outer cave, and he had furnished it with rugs, a camp-bed, an armchair, a stove, and a few necessities for cooking. But Kit shook her head as she surveyed it: It was no home for an old man.

Her curiosity fired, she went with Redwing to the mouth of another large cave that led on into the darkness. On the walls were drawings made thousands of years before by an ancient race of which there was no other record. Lighting match after match, she moved on down corridors that widened into other caves and seemed to have no end.

"Ugh! Fancy getting lost in here!" she shivered.

"Bad!" agreed Redwing. "But one way out. One way go through along."

"What? Right through?" asked Kit.

The hermit's voice answered her; she had not realised that he had followed, and she wheeled.

"No, there is no way through. I have sought it for so many years in vain," he said. "But if there were such a way, my son might have found it by chance; he might have gone through to safety."

Redwing looked at Kit in the flickering light of the match.

"Redskins know way," she said softly.

But Kit silenced her with a gesture that she concealed from the hermit; for she feared that if he heard he might start searching all over again, only to have his hopes doomed.

Kit turned back, and, with Redwing, reached the clear air again, sighing in relief. There was something awe-inspiring and frightening about the vastness of the catacombs.

There and then Kit made up her mind that this must remain the old man's home no longer, but she said nothing to him about it.

"Before we go," Kit said, "I suppose I couldn't see a photograph of your son?"

The hermit was only too eager to show her the one photograph he had, and, opening a drawer in a simple cupboard he had made himself, he took it from its hiding-place—a large, heavy scientific book.

The photograph showed a smiling-faced boy holding a gun almost as large as himself and looking very proud of having it. But Kit stared at it; her brow contracted, and then she gave a sharp, startled exclamation.

"What surprises you?" the hermit asked quickly.

Kit shook her head and did not say what was in her mind.

"I—I just thought I recognised a likeness to someone," she said, "but I guess I'm wrong."



"Mighty crazy thing, that, Kit," he protested.  
 "Sorry, dad," Kit smiled, "but the deed is done; the hermit's got food, and we're safe. But say! Is Ken Dallas around?"

"Ken Dallas? He's somewhere around, yes; but listen here. I want no more of these wild outings, Kit."

"O.K., dad. If you can help me, I'll fix it that the hermit leaves his cave," said Kit. "He's an old man, and even if the bridge was still there, it'd be wrong to let him go on living in his cave alone."

"Without explaining why she wanted to see Ken Dallas, Kit sought him out. He was grooming a horse, and looked up with a smile.

Kit felt a queer shivering thrill run through her as she met that smile; for it was the exact replica of that the boy of nine had worn in the photograph.

"Lo, Ken," said Kit. "If you want a good afternoon's fun, I can recommend something. Jes' try shooting the rapids in the canyon near the catacombs."

She saw his face cloud.  
 "Catacombs! Kind of caves?" he asked.

"Yeah, caves—and plenty of them." He shook his head.

"I don't mind the rapids, but you can sure keep the caves," he said, frowning. "Ever since I was a nipper, I've been scared of the caves, Miss Kit."

Kit's eyes sparkled with excitement. "Ken," she exclaimed. "Tell me something. Can you remember your dad?"

She saw surprise in his look; then he coloured slightly.

"Waal, yes. Thick-set, dark fellow," he said. "Why?"

"Th-thick set—dark?" faltered Kit. Her hopes were dashed to the ground; for that description most certainly did not fit the hermit! He could not be Ken's father—and Ken therefore was, after all, not the lad who had mysteriously disappeared.

"Any pertickler reason for asking?" Ken said with a frown.

"Jes'—waaal, curiosity. I—I saw some one mighty like you, that's all, and wondered," said Kit.

She turned away then, but she had taken only a step when Ken walked after her, and touched her shoulder. There was a glint in his eyes, and his usually good-tempered face wore a stern look.

"Has there bin talk about my dad bein' an Injun?" he said challengingly.

Kit stared at him.

"Not that I've heard talk of, Ken," she replied.

"Oh! O.K.," he said, abashed. "O.K., Miss Kit. But—these boys have their fun; and jes' becous I know a lot of Indian talk, they've got to ragging me."

He didn't look a Redskin, and Kit wondered how the story had got around, but she assured him that she had had no such thought in mind.

Returning to the ranch-house, she sought out her father.

"Say, dad, if I gave the old hermit an invitation to spend a week here—would you mind?" she asked.

Her dad hesitated a moment.

"Waal, I'm not saying I'd be delighted, Kit; but he shouldn't be left alone there, cut off from the world. If he'll come, he'll be welcome.

But

"Yes? What's the but?" Kit smiled.

"You're not going to cross those rapids again to take the invitation. I'll get it sent over myself some way," he said.

"Dad. You're sure a brick," said Kit in delight, and gave her father an affectionate hug.

Then she hurried to get pen and paper and sketch out an invitation that might tempt the old man to the ranch.

But Kit did not get very far with her letter; for there came sounds of a commotion in the compound. There were angry words, and then the bark of a gun.

Kit's father leaped up; but Kit was at the door first.

She ran into the compound and then drew up, aghast.

Darrel Lamoine, least popular of all the cowboys, stood half bent, his right hand gripping his left wrist as though in pain. A dozen yards from him stood Ken Dallas, a smoking six-shooter in his hand, his face red with anger.

"My gosh—you've shot him, Ken?" gasped Kit.

"He was drawing his gun, and I've warned him before," Ken said thickly. "I said the next crack I heard about Redskins I'd let fly—"

Lamoine looked up, his face pale, his eyes blazing.

"You were brought up by Redskins," he jeered. "If you're not part Redskin then tell me why that was so?"

Kit's dad stepped between them, while Bill, the foreman, examined the wound, to announce it was only slight.

"That's the last crack anyone wants to hear about Ken's upbringing," he growled. "Or maybe I'll have something to say, too."

Kit looked at Ken, silent, her mind racing with startling thoughts; then she turned, hurrying away to find Redwing.

Ken Dallas had been brought up by Redskins. And to Kit that was exciting, significant.

"Redwing," she exclaimed, when she had found her friend. "Where does that secret outlet from the catacombs end? Near to a Redskin tribe?"

Redwing nodded her head slowly.

"Um. Near," Redwing agreed.

"Then can you get to that tribe and find out if they brought up a white boy years ago?" said Kit. "If so, get to know what happened."

Redwing slipped away, and it was dark when Kit, in her room preparing to go to bed, heard her friend's call below at the window.

"What did you learn?" she asked eagerly, leaning out.

Redwing cupped her hands to form a megaphone and called a reply.

"Long time back, yes. Boy went away with wandering tribe. Not know what happened. Boy not know where he belong when Redskins find him."

Kit gave a soft whistle; for she realised the truth now.

"Geel! Then he did find his way out. He found his way out, and lost his memory, I guess. Redwing—Ken Dallas is the hermit's son!"

"Ken not know?" asked Redwing.

"He doesn't know, and he mightn't believe it if he was told," said Kit softly. "And mebbe his father wouldn't know it either. But I've got a plan, Redwing—a way out."

On the morrow Kit's invitation was sent to the hermit, but no mention was made in it of his son. The answer that came back was kindly, but firm. The hermit was not leaving his cave!

"Dad, there's only one thing for it now—he's got to be made to come," said Kit. "But let me go with the men; we don't want any rough stuff. And let me choose who shall go."

And Kit's first choice, needless to say, would be Ken Dallas!

**Lost in the Same Catacombs!**

"NOT a sign of him! He's got right into the catacombs."

Kit looked at the empty cave which, only the day before, had been the hermit's furnished home. But he had fled from it after receiving her note, afraid that he would not be allowed to remain there.



**EXCITEDLY**, Kit led the other cowboys on to the scene as the young puncher gathered the hermit into his arms. They'd found the old fellow after all—but there was an even more amazing side to it than that!

Bill looked at the deserted cave and muttered angrily.

"If I get this hermit, he'll come across all right!" he grunted. "He must be plumb crazy!"

"Where's he now?" asked Ken Dallas, one of the party of five. "In the catacombs," said Kit. "We'd better search. Even though he does know them well, he might get lost. He might have fallen, hurt his leg, and be there helpless."

Kit did not think that likely, but she wanted to get Ken Dallas into the catacombs.

It looked like being a job, for whereas Bill and the others, with the torches they had brought for this contingency, were ready enough to start exploring, Ken held back.

"Not afraid, Ken?" asked Kit.

"Not exactly," Ken answered, shamefaced. "But caves give me the creeps. Nothing'll get me in there."

Bill and the others were already inside the caves, the rays of their torches getting fainter as they went farther into the depths.

"Aw, come on, Ken!" urged Kit.

"I'm staying right here," said Kit. "O.K. Then I'll go," said Kit. "But if you stay here, keep hollering every now and then to let them have the direction."

Kit went into the darkness; but Bill and the others were already swallowed up, and though ten minutes passed, she did not seem to get any nearer to them. She halted, flashed the torch about her at the damp walls of the cave, and shouted.

Only the echo of her own voice answered her, and with a strange, sinking uneasiness, she turned back. Probably she had taken a wrong turning, and could find the right way now. But the catacomb was like a maze. There were turnings in all directions, and Kit could not tell one from the other.

When, after twenty minutes at least, she found herself at a dead end, her heart sank, and real fear seized her.

For all she knew to the contrary she might be a mile from the entrance, and if she took the wrong turning and walked on, soon she might even end up two miles away.

Fiercely she pulled herself together. Panicking would not help her; it was a time for cool thinking. Remembering that the sound of heavy steps was likely to reverberate in the stone, Kit dropped to the ground and pressed her ear to it. At first she heard nothing, but then the ring of steps came to her. She ran forward, listened again, and found them fainter. When she moved back they sounded louder. Thus guided in the right direction, Kit hurried on, shouting and whistling. It was joy of the sweetest kind when she heard Bill's echoing voice.

"Bill!" she shouted.

"Miss Kit—we're lost!" he answered. Kit joined them, and was quite startled to see how scared they looked, though they reckoned themselves to be.

"Keep cool!" she advised. "Don't let's take any direction without thinking. Ken's at the entrance, and I've told him to holler every few minutes. His voice will be our guide."

Pressing her ear to a wall, Kit listened. For ten minutes she tried in various places to pick up the sound of Ken's voice, and then at last she heard it.

But it was twenty minutes later that they saw daylight.

Kit, instead of pressing on, halted.

"Bill—all of you—listen," she said quietly. "The hermit is somewhere here. He may be just hiding; he may

be lost; he may be ill or injured. There's no telling. But he's somewhere here. Years ago his son was lost here. That's why he still hangs around. Something tells him that his son is still alive."

"What, alive after all these years in the catacombs, with nothing to eat? He must be crazy to think of it!" scoffed Bill.

"But he's right. His son is still alive," said Kit quickly. "Only he escaped from the catacombs—escaped with his memory gone, perhaps through shock, through accident. But he's alive, and waiting at the entrance of the cave now. His name is Ken Dallas!"

They were silent, and Bill expressed their feelings in one word:

"Baloney!"

"O.K.," said Kit easily. "Let's try it out. I'm getting Ken into these caves. And there's just one way of doing it. You keep still as you like and wait."

Kit crept forward almost to the bend that gave a view of the entrance; then, as loudly as she could, she yelled:

"Help! Help!"

The sound echoed and rolled and reverberated. It reached the entrance, and Ken Dallas heard it.

## COMPANION TO THE SULTAN'S DAUGHTER

You will get all the glamour of the East, together with all the adventures and excitement of the desert in this grand new story by Margery Marriott. It begins in this week's issue of our companion paper, the—

## GIRLS' CRYSTAL

Six Fine Stories in Each  
Issue—2d. Every Friday

Kit did not know what torment he suffered, what battle was fought in his mind; but she knew that he was a man—that hearing that cry he would not stay outside.

Three times she called, and then his voice rang out:

"All right! I'm coming!"

Hearing his steps, Kit drew back.

"Ken," she called.

He came into view, and she flashed her torch on his white, strained face.

"What's wrong?" he jerked out.

"We're near the entrance?" Kit asked.

"Yeah. No more'n a hundred yards. Come on, quick!" he snapped. "If you'd listened, you'd have heard my voice, and I needn't have come in. I tell you this place gets me soared; it gives me the creeps."

Kit took his sleeve and held on to him.

"Just a minute, Ken," she said. "The old man's here. We're all hoarse with calling—"

"I'm the same—"

"All right. Give just one yell. Call the old boy. He answers the name 'Dad.'"

Ken stared at her, his eyes wide.

"Dad?" he said.

"Shout for him!" urged Kit.

Ken took a step forward, stood for a moment irresolute and then called.

"Hey—Dad! Dad!" he shouted.

His powerful voice rolled and reverberated in the catacombs, and Kit, holding her breath, waited and listened.

Then, so suddenly that even though she was expecting it, it came as a shock, she heard the reply.

"Son—I've hurt my leg. I can't move. Son—"

Ken Dallas, without a torch, pressed on into the darkness. Close behind him came Kit!

"Mark the walls—blaze a trail," she shouted, "or we'll all be lost!"

Ahead of her, keeping just within the rays of her torch, ran Dallas; the voice guided him, and a few minutes later he halted at the mouth of a dead-end cave.

Inside it was the hermit; he had climbed through the jagged hole in the wall, had slipped, and with a sprained ankle had been unable to return.

Kit flashed the torch on to Ken's face, and the hermit stared at him incredulously.

"Son—is it really you? It is—it is—"

Ken stood still. His hands were at his cheeks, and he seemed hardly to breathe.

"Gee—I—it's coming back," he choked. "It's coming back."

The hermit, tears in his eyes, clasped the young man to him. Despite the change that time had wrought in his son's face, he recognised him. And Ken, who, twenty years before, half crazy with terror in these same catacombs, had lost his memory when Redskins found him, now regained it under the counter influence of this new shock.

The mist that had obscured his early years rolled away; and his powerful arms went round his frail father.

"Gee, dad—after all these years!" he muttered. "I got lost here as a child, before the Redskins found me! It's all come back."

Kit returned to Bill and the others, her eyes alight with happiness.

"O.K., boys," she said. "The hermit's coming to Red Ranch—and without the need of force—except maybe he'll need carrying because of his sprained ankle."

Bill looked at her in bewilderment. "Seems kinder like magic to me. Mean ter say Ken's his son? But gee! How did you find it out, Miss Kit?"

Kit smiled.

"Mebbe feminine instinct, Bill. Or mebbe, I just had a hunch!"

It would have been hard to say which of the two was happier or prouder, father or son, when they held a celebration party at Red Ranch the next day; but the guest of honour at that party was Kit Hartley, and at her request a Redskin girl shared the honours with her.

The secret way out of the catacombs known to the Redskins remained a secret, for neither the hermit nor his son wanted to go into the catacombs again; and Kit's curiosity was not enough to fire her with the desire to find it.

The hermit was no longer a hermit; Ken's ancestry and early childhood was no longer a troublesome mystery—and for Kit that was a happy enough end.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

BE sure to tell all your friends about these lovely stories—and don't forget to renew your acquaintance with Kit and Redwing next week.



Our dramatic Girl Detective serial.



# Valerie Drew's HOLIDAY MYSTERY

By  
**ISABEL NORTON**

FOR NEW READERS.

VALERIE DREW, the famous girl detective, and her clever Alsatian dog,

FLASH, are on holiday at Sunnyslads Farm, which is run as an hotel by a hard-working, likeable young girl,

DOROTHY DEAN. Dorothy seems to have a secret enemy, who is trying to drive guests from the farm. Mysterious things happen and suspicion falls upon one of the guests.

JOHNNY JEVONS, a bolsterous young fellow who is a confirmed practical joker. Valerie, though puzzled by him, likes him nevertheless. After some pearls, belonging to one of the other guests, a short-tempered woman named

MRS. CROBY have been stolen during a game of blind man's buff. Mrs. Croby decides to leave. But Valerie finds the pearls buried in the farm, and hurries to the beach, where Mrs. Croby is spending her last hours before her departure. She finds the woman and several more guests gathered around a rubber tent Mrs. Croby owns. It has been punctured by dozens of pins. Mrs. Croby exhibits a handkerchief found in the tent's box, and Valerie sees the initials—J. J. She is astounded. J. J. can only mean Johnny Jevons. Is he the mystery plotter, after all?

(Now read on.)

## The Watch!

**A**FTER that one dumbfounding glimpse of the incriminating handkerchief, Valerie Drew's eyes turned keenly to search the faces of the group in bathing costumes gathered around Mrs. Croby.

Her gaze came to rest on Johnny Jevons. It was inevitable. She knew she must now, at all costs, decide what was her real feeling towards him.

The good-looking boy, his hands on his hips, still had his usual air of easy assurance. His attractively bronzed face, despite the tension in the atmosphere, retained a shadow of its habitual grin. But he was plainly puzzled as well.

"Tell us whose hanky it is, Mrs. Croby!" Johnny urged. All at once his lips twitched, and Valerie saw a characteristic twinkle in his eyes. "I say, don't tell us poor old Uncle Nathan's broken out at last!"

Valerie remained silent. She was still watching intently.

"Shut up, idiot!" hissed freckled Marjorie, giving him a nudge. "It's no time for your silly wisecracks—"

"Are you sure, Mr. Jevons," interposed Mrs. Croby acridly, "that that is all you have to say?"

She held the handkerchief aloft with a shaking hand.

"It's yours," she accused him—"your handkerchief. The initials are 'J. J.'—Johnny Jevons! And you stand there so audaciously, still glorying in your rascally trick—"

Seeing she was almost beside herself with fury, Valerie stepped tactfully to her side.

"Mrs. Croby, that handkerchief doesn't exactly prove anything," she said soothingly. "We're all very hurt that you've been treated so badly, but we really ought to be certain of our facts before we say something we might be sorry for afterwards." Taking the handkerchief, she tossed it towards Johnny. "Take a look for yourself—I

short-sighted," he asked, "as to leave handkerchiefs lying about?"

"Don't consult Miss Drew," said Mrs. Croby, her voice hard and scornful. "Valerie undertook to help us on a previous occasion. She was unable—"

"Not quite unable, Mrs. Croby," Valerie evenly interposed. "I hurried along here, as it happens, for the special purpose of seeing you. I came to give you—these!"

She opened her handbag as she spoke; to murmured gasps of astonishment from the others she handed the angry woman her missing pearls.

"I found those hidden in the garden, Mrs. Croby," she explained.

"Hidden in the garden?" A bitter smile crossed Mrs. Croby's face. "Who would hide them there?" she asked sarcastically.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Valerie regretfully.

Mrs. Croby dropped her pearls into her handbag.

"Thank you, Miss Drew." She gave Valerie a frigid smile in which there was no gratitude at all. "I hope you will enjoy the rest of your investigations at the farm. It will not be my pleasure, unfortunately, to see how long it takes a trained detective to discover the guilt of an impudent little rascal everyone else can see right under their noses. Come on, my dears!"

With unexpected gentleness she took one hand of each of her distressed children. "We'll have a nice little paddle instead," she soothingly told them, "then mummy's going to take you to a much nicer place than a farm to spend the rest of your holiday."

Valerie watched the three of them crossing the beach. She still felt rather sorry in her heart for Mrs. Croby, even though the woman was so bitter, yet what it meant most to Valerie was that, despite all her efforts, she had failed utterly to help Dorothy in any way at all.

Turning towards the suspected culprit, she saw him sitting down cheerfully on the sand in the centre of a circle he had just drawn with a sharp shell.

"There's the quarantine flag," Johnny brightly explained, pointing to a little emblem he had stuck at one

**AT 9.15 A WATCH STOPPED**

**And that enabled Valerie to make a startling revelation to everyone at Sunnyslads Farm.**

don't think there's much doubt about it being yours, old son!"

Johnny caught it deftly and glanced at the corner where the fateful initials appeared. His cheeks suddenly coloured.

"Can you deny that that's your property, sir?" demanded grey-haired Colonel Benn.

Johnny looked up, startled by the bark in his voice.

"Can't deny this very well!" he admitted, scratching his head. "I'm certainly the only 'J. J.' at the farm. But how the dickens—"

"Young man," interrupted the colonel fiercely, "we're all waiting to hear what explanation you have to offer."

"Johnny," interposed Valerie levelly, "the handkerchief was inside the box with the damaged tent. We can't get away from that."

"Well, who—" began Johnny, and suddenly checked himself. "Have you found criminals usually so

side of his "island." "Don't come near me, anyone, in case my wickedness is catching. Gosh, what's that for?" he ejaculated, as a handful of sand descended on his unruly locks.

"To give you something to keep you busy, instead of talking a lot of drivel that doesn't help anyone," Valerie answered, brushing sand off her fingers. "If you're slung out of the farm after this you'll have nobody to congratulate more warmly than yourself!"

Turning, before Johnny could reply to that unexpected outburst, Valerie called Flash to her side and crossed to the spot where Mrs. Croby's punctured tent lay abandoned by its owner.

"Tent, boy!" Valerie whispered to her pet. "Sniff it!" She stooped and whispered the word more impressively in his ear, to make quite sure he understood what she meant. "Tent!" she repeated.

Flash gave a wave of his bushy tail and Valerie was satisfied, knowing he would recognise its distinctive "rubbery" odour again whenever required.

Glancing back to the beach, she saw Johnny, still grinning inside his sandy circle. For a moment her eyes narrowed, for she was still as perplexed about Johnny as ever. He was either a thoroughly callous rascal who just didn't care what people thought of him, or he was putting on a really brave face in a very difficult position. Which was she to believe?

The other bathers, equally baffled, seemed to be forming two camps. Colonel Benn, fiercely hostile, was rallying those who believed Johnny guilty. Freckled Marjorie headed the younger element, who still maintained nothing was proved.

"What a shocking mix-up!" thought Valerie unhappily as she remounted her borrowed bicycle and started to pedal back to the farmhouse. "If only I could really get something definite to work on!"

For behind all these set-backs, some

of them quite trivial in themselves, she sensed something immensely bigger. They were all making things more difficult for Dorothy to run the holiday farm successfully.

Mrs. Croby's intended departure had been serious enough by itself, for it meant a loss of valuable income. Already, however, it was overshadowed in Valerie's mind by what she had just observed on the beach. If people started dividing into two schools of opinion there would soon be definite hostility amongst the guests. That would be worse still.

She kept a sharp look-out for the gipsified woman who had spoken to her on her way down to the beach; for she was still convinced the woman had some peculiar interest in the ruins, and had not forgotten once surprising Johnny in conversation with her. But the spot where she had been painting was vacant.

Dorothy met her in the farmyard. Her eager expression fled as Valerie made her regretful report; for a moment or two, hearing about the damaged tent and Johnny's handkerchief, she looked stunned with dismay.

"And Mrs. Croby just took the return of her pearls for granted? Oh dear!" sighed Dorothy. She made a plucky effort to smile, in spite of feeling so cast-down at this fresh blow. "Well, Mrs. Croby isn't everyone, and she's always been terribly hard to please. Perhaps we'll get someone nicer in her place."

Valerie, giving her a heartening smile, entered into the house. Straight up to Mrs. Croby's room she went, and there looked at Flash.

"Tent, boy!" she whispered, closing the door.

Flash, his nose close to the floor, crossed to a small dressing-room opening off at one side.

Following him, Valerie found he had come to a stop where a litter of papers covered the floor. Here, Flash was plainly telling her, the tent had evidently lain in its box for some time

before being taken down to the beach this morning.

Stooping, Valerie began to turn the packing papers over one by one. As she did so she suddenly heard something slip from under one of them. To her astonishment, she discovered it was a man's watch.

Her violet eyes widening with immediate interest, Valerie saw that the glass was broken and the dial crushed, as if someone had stepped upon it while it was lying under the scattered packing papers.

"My goodness!" Valerie breathed with deep satisfaction. "Something to work on at last!"

Picking the broken watch up, she examined it for finger-prints. Its close contact with the tissue paper had, unfortunately, rubbed off any which had been on it. The watch itself was a Crowney—a cheap-priced, popular model, and one which had evidently been in use for some time. Small dents and scratches on the case suggested that its owner was careless about it.

How it had got on the floor in the first place was still a mystery, but Valerie did not intend it to remain one for long.

With the help of this unexpected clue the girl detective believed she would soon be able to put her perplexing doubts concerning Johnny Jevons at rest for good!

### Startling Proof!

"HALLO, Dorothy!" Valerie heard Uncle Nathan exclaim in surprised tones. "Why are you moving all the chairs about like that?"

It was half an hour later, and Valerie, reaching the threshold of the dining-room, saw Dorothy turn guiltily at her Uncle Nathan's question.

"Mrs. Croby and her children left a few minutes ago, uncle," Dorothy quietly responded. "Naturally, we don't want to have three empty places at the table to remind people of what's just happened."

"Oh dear! What a fool I was not to think of that!" stammered Uncle Nathan in confusion. "Let me help you, my dear. Give me the spare cutlery, and I'll take it back to the kitchen. I want to be useful when I can."

Valerie saw him gather it up clumsily, drop a fork, stoop awkwardly to retrieve it, then shuffle to the kitchen with knives and forks sticking in all directions out of his hands.

"Sorry, dear!" apologised Valerie, with a sympathetic smile. "I always seem to butt in at the wrong moment."

"Don't you worry about me, Val," Dorothy assured her. "Uncle Nathan always means well. He can't help it that he'll never win a prize for tact."

Valerie smiled and helped Dorothy to rearrange the chairs, for she knew there was nothing else they could do about Mrs. Croby now. The sooner she was forgotten the better.

"Lucky, remarked Valerie, with a satisfied glance towards the windows, "the others sound pretty full of pep again!"

Being so near the usual hour for lunch, cars were driving into the farmyard.

"Just look at Johnny, Val!" ejaculated Dorothy, observing the tousled-haired, good-looking boy standing in the middle of the yard. "Could anything ever put him off his stroke for long?"

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Valerie laughed. "That's the right expression this time!" she agreed as she watched his antics.

For Johnny, having made an enormous tee of chicken food, had mounted a large, coloured rubber ball on top, and was now earnestly "addressing" it with a wet bathing costume.

"Fore!" yelled Johnny, gazing aggressively around him at the amused onlookers. "If that doesn't warn some of you—five, six, seven, and eight as well!"

But before Valerie could see Johnny's "drive" a discreet cough in the doorway caused her to turn her head. Her smile fled instantly as she saw the stiff, soldierly figure entering the room. Out of the corners of her eyes she flashed a sympathetic glance at Dorothy.

For Colonel Benn, the person in question, had certainly not forgotten what had happened!

"A painful duty, Miss Dean," he said primly. "I regret to have to inform you I must leave the farm after tea to-day."

Dorothy caught her breath. Valerie stared in bewilderment. Another one going! For the moment they were almost too taken aback to say anything at all.

"Colonel, I'm terribly sorry—" Dorothy began uneasily.

"So am I!" Looking grim and accusing, the colonel turned his gaze on Valerie. "Miss Drew will probably explain," he said. And Valerie in an instant realised how mortally she had offended him on the beach by suggesting Johnny might not be as guilty as he looked. "Miss Drew is my reason for going, anyway!" the colonel sarcastically added as he turned on his heel and left the room.

Valerie bit her lip. "Dorothy, I'm terribly sorry," she said unhappily. "Whatever I do seems to be wrong. You can see it's me the colonel's furious with. It might even be better if I cleared off, instead of—"

"Val, don't be a goose! Of course you won't!" Dorothy exclaimed in amazement. "What ever next! And you came here to have a holiday, too! Why, Val, you must consider me terribly ungrateful—"

"I don't think anything of the sort, Dorothy," Valerie assured her, with a baffled smile. "I just don't seem to get anywhere." Her expression suddenly became more thoughtful, her violet eyes grew keener. "Can I take charge and ask a few questions before the guests go away after lunch?" she asked.

Dorothy gave her a puzzled smile. "Why, certainly, Val!" she agreed. "Anything you suggest goes with me. And good luck, too! You deserve a break."

Valerie, carefully marshalling her thoughts, did not forget to keep a wary eye on her fellow guests.

"Ladies and gentlemen, may I say a few words?" she smilingly requested, rising the moment she saw some of the guests were ready to leave the dining-room.

There was a stir at every table. It was a tense moment for Valerie. She saw Johnny watching her expectantly, his humorous eyes still twinkling. Colonel Benn, as stiff as a poker, stared at her woodenly.

"We all understand why Mrs. Crobey's left us," declared Valerie, coming straight to her point. "Not to mince words, a very dirty trick was played on her this morning over her bathing tent."



"I AM leaving this place after tea," the colonel declared gruffly, "and if you want to know why, ask Miss Drew. She's to blame!" And shooting Valerie a ferocious glare, the angry guest swept out.

"By gad, I'm glad you realise it at last, young lady!" muttered the colonel, shooting a fierce look at Johnny.

"Certain evidence found at the time," Valerie smoothly proceeded, "was believed to implicate a member of the house-party. I wasn't satisfied that a mere handkerchief was all the proof of guilt needed under the circumstances, so I came back to the house to look around." Her level gaze moved from table to table as she paused to give her next words the weight they deserved. "I made a search in Mrs. Crobey's room," Valerie finished. "and found something else."

"What was it, Val?" asked freckled Dorothy, breaking the breathless silence which followed.

"A watch," answered Valerie. "Has anyone lost one?" She saw an instant stir at Johnny's table. All eyes had turned on him. His grin became suddenly fixed, and for once, even he seemed at a loss.

"What's the joke about, Val?" he ejaculated. "Everyone knows I've lost my own ticker. It was an old Crowney and—"

"It was a rather battered Crowney, Johnny," interposed Valerie evenly, "that I found under the packing papers where the tent was damaged."

An electric thrill passed through the dining-room.

"By gad, that proves it!" ejaculated Colonel Benn triumphantly. "If someone doesn't horsewhip the little scoundrel now—"

"I beg your pardon, colonel," Valerie firmly interposed, her glance sterner. She turned deliberately back to Johnny. "When did you lose your watch?" she asked crisply.

"I couldn't find it when I got up this morning," Johnny answered.

"Did you wind it last night?" "Yes," said Johnny with an uncertain smile.

"I'm a witness that he did," put in Marjorie unexpectedly. "He checked it by the wireless and wound it up like an engine."

"Does your watch keep good time, as a rule?" proceeded Valerie.

"Perfect!" Johnny glanced at the puzzled, reproachful faces all around

him and smiled uncertainly. "That's the marvellous thing about my old ticker. But how could it have got into Mrs. Crobey's den—"

"You young rascal!" fumed Colonel Benn. "You dropped it there yourself! It's as plain—"

"Nothing's plain yet, colonel," Valerie declared, "except that, in my view, someone put the watch there, intending it to count as evidence against Johnny."

The colonel gasped. "Fantastic nonsense!" he boomed. "The case is proved! You've no evidence—"

"On the contrary, I've still something to explain," Valerie coolly answered. "The watch was lying under several papers. We now know it was wound last night, and keeping good time.

After putting the watch there, the person who tampered with the tent accidentally trod on the watch, smashing its face." With a quick movement she opened her handbag and held up the vital watch for everyone to see. "You will notice," she dramatically told them, "that this watch was crushed at exactly a quarter past nine!"

Incredulous gasps swept the room as the significance of her words came home to everyone.

"Then Johnny can't have done it!" Marjorie cried, her face alight with relief. "He was in here, having breakfast, at a quarter past nine!"

"Johnny was down at nine, in fact!" "Bravo, Val! It couldn't have been Johnny!"

Grim-faced and unforgiving, Colonel Benn sprang to his feet.

"Rubbish! Utter nonsense!" he boomed, and strode furiously out of the room.

A breathless silence followed, but nobody else moved. Then, all at once, Marjorie started to clap, and others quickly followed her example.

It was an unforgettable moment for Valerie. Johnny, trying to stammer a few words of thanks to her, appeared more embarrassed than she had ever seen him before. The general sensation of relief in the room could almost be felt. Nobody, in their hearts, had



wanted to think the worst of the cheerful young man.

Silently Valerie nodded.

And yet, even though she had vindicated Johnny, Valerie was not satisfied. She still seemed no nearer to discovering who Dorothy's mysterious enemy was than when she first started.

### In the Ruins!

"ROUNDERS, Val! You'll join in, won't you?" Marjorie called persuasively across the farmyard, when, an hour later, Valerie's distinctive red-gold hair appeared in the doorway of the farmhouse.

"Yes, come on, Val!" urged spectacled Peter Passleigh.

"Give the handcuffs a rest," suggested Johnny, with a cheerful grin, "and finish polishing 'em after tea!"

Valerie smilingly shook her head.

"Can't; I've got to finish oiling the locks," she responded, in the same chaffing spirit. "Ask me to-morrow."

"But you'll join in the ghost game to-night—in the ruins?"

"Maybe," said Valerie.

Frowning, she turned back to the house.

"A ghost game—in the ruins!" she reflected. "Wonder whose idea that is? And why after dinner? It'll be dark again by then!"

Moved by a sudden impulse, she went across to a near-by window and stood for several moments gazing at the gaunt, ivy-clad ruins of the ancient Norman priory which lay only a short way from the farmyard.

She recalled the scare caused by the ingeniously constructed "squeaker," the shadowy figure she had glimpsed in flight amongst the crumbling walls, and the gilt bracelet she had found, without discovering its owner. There had always been a lurking suspicion in her mind that the ruins had some sinister connection with all the mystery.

Turning abruptly on her heel, she went in search of Dorothy.

"The ghost game, Val?" Dorothy repeated, with a smile. "Yes, I know all about it. It was found in the suggestion box, and the committee thought it a very good idea and decided to try it out to-night." Her expression suddenly changed as she saw the thoughtful look still in Valerie's eyes. "I say," she added anxiously, "you don't see any danger in it, do you?"

Valerie perched on the edge of the table.

"Can't say yet," she confessed.

"I hope I did nothing wrong in giving the O.K.," Dorothy said anxiously.

"I suppose this 'Ghost' game is something like the 'Murder' one people play such a lot," Valerie looked at Dorothy intently. "Whose suggestion was it?"

"I can't tell you, Val," answered Dorothy frankly. "It was just popped in the box along with all the other suggestions. Like to see it?"

"Please!" said Valerie; and, following Dorothy to her attractive little office, she took the paper Dorothy dug out from a pile on her desk. "I'll read it through. Don't you worry your head about it, my dear. I'm just being careful for once. Carry on arranging the flowers and leave Aunt Valerie to scratch her head instead!"

Dorothy, reassured by Valerie's manner, returned to her duties.

Valerie's eyes immediately grew more thoughtful as she read the written suggestion. Only one thing about it bothered her.

"I've kept a pretty sharp eye on everyone's handwriting since I've been here," she reflected, "yet I don't seem to recognise this at all. Wonder who did write it and pop it in the box?"

She made her way into the hall and opened the visitors' book, which all guests were required to sign on arrival.

To her growing amazement she found no style of writing which bore any resemblance to the other.

She realised instantly there could be only two likely explanations. One was that the "instructions" had been sent by a friend of someone staying at the farm, and had been slipped into the box without any added comment. The other was that the writing had been deliberately disguised.

Folding the paper carefully, and slipping it into her handbag, Valerie left the farmhouse by a side door. Seeing Flash near at hand, investigating a mystery of his own which was evidently strongly connected with rabbits, she smiled to herself, and did not bother to call him to her side.

The younger members of the party were still at their game of rounders in the farmyard, and overhead the sun was shining. It did not seem that Valerie could possibly need her pet's protection under such circumstances.

Entering by a yawning cavity in the ruined wall, she found herself inside the ruins once more.

The more she thought about her problem, the more anxious she felt to discover the identity of the mysterious person whose anonymous suggestion would bring a party of thrill-seekers to the ruins after darkness had fallen to-night.

Was it all a trick? Was Dorothy's mysterious foe planning to strike yet again?

Valerie thrilled unpleasantly at the possibility, but only for a moment.

If her guess was correct, it meant that she might be able to take precautions to foil the unknown enemy.

Suddenly, moving amongst the crumbled masonry piers which dotted the grass-grown floors, Valerie paused and drew into the shadows. She was sure she had heard the sound of someone moving about near at hand.

"Mr. Nathan!" a voice called plaintively a moment later. "Are you in here, Mr. Nathan? I've brought your cup of tea!"

Smilingly, Valerie stepped back out of her place of concealment just as Emily, the shy, dark-haired maid at the farmhouse, came wandering towards her with a steaming cup in her hand.

"Oh, Miss Drew, I heard you around and thought you must be Mr. Nathan," Emily exclaimed, looking innocently disappointed.

"I think I saw Mr. Nathan near the beehives," Valerie responded; and Emily, giving her a worried smile, hurried away.

Intent on her quest once more, as soon as she judged Emily to be safely out of the way, Valerie pressed on amongst the broken pillars.

At almost the same moment something which was destined to provoke considerable discussion later on happened in the farmyard just beyond the ruined walls.

Johnny, batting before a tree, received an easy one, and, timing it

beautifully, took a terrific swipe that sent the ball soaring far over the heads of all the fielders. To their obvious disgust, it vanished right inside the ruins.

"Johnny, have a heart!" protested Peter Passleigh, gazing blankly in the direction in which the ball had gone.

"No need to swipe like that, Johnny!" added Marjorie reproachfully.

Grimping cheerfully, Johnny dropped the bat. He had enjoyed the opportunity of having a crack like that. His energy showed no signs of abating yet.

"S'alright!" he sang out cheerfully. "You poor mutts have a rest. I'll soon find it."

The poor mutts watched Johnny disappear into the ruins, and waited. They waited a long time. A minute elapsed, and still Johnny did not reappear. In the end, freckled Marjorie up-ended a bucket and sat down as though prepared to wait for some considerable time.

"Now the silly ass can't even find it," she said scornfully. "Seems we'd better get Valerie to."

There was a cheerful laugh at her whimsical suggestion, for certainly nobody guessed that, at that very moment, Valerie was indeed following what promised to be the most astonishing clue she had discovered since her arrival at the farm!

For something very odd indeed had happened recently in the old Norman priory.

Dorothy had several times assured Valerie that the ruins were safe to wander in at any time of the day or night, yet Valerie had now come upon a spot, half hidden behind a low wall which was anything but safe.

Two or three heavy planks, which until recently had been sunk firmly in the ground, had been pulled up and dragged to one side. Where they had previously lain, there was a black, yawning hole in the ground!

"And this is the place," Valerie reflected grimly, "where people are planning to play a game in the darkness! Anyone would get a nasty fall down there."

Stooping, Valerie examined the ground intently. Thrillingly she saw there was a faint footprint, evidently left in the disturbed soil by the person who had been so wickedly busy. She could, with luck, take an impression of it. All she needed was wax or plaster.

But just then something happened—something which caused her heart to give a leap of apprehension.

She heard the sound of someone near at hand—someone running towards her.

Valerie sought to whirl around in a sharp, anxious instinct of defence. Just as she did so, she heard two-clear "tap-tap" footsteps on the stone floor immediately behind her. Next instant hands struck heavily against her shoulder-blades.

Caught off her guard like that, Valerie was powerless to do anything to save herself. Before she could even catch the merest glimpse of her cowardly attacker, she was plunging helplessly through the black cavity!

**THIS is an alarming happening, isn't it? Who can have attacked Valerie in such a wicked manner, and—what ever will happen to her? Next Saturday's chapters are more enthralling than ever—and full of dramatic surprises.**